

Prelude: Steppin'

We live our lives in years, swift, flying, transient years. We hold the possible future in our hands but not by wish and will, only by thought, plan, knowledge, and organization. If the college can pour into the coming age an American Negro who knows himself and his plight and how to protect himself and fight race prejudice, then the world of our dreams will come true and not otherwise.

—

W.E.B DuBois (1933)

The preceding quote by DuBois was taken from a speech he gave during the era of segregation entitled "The Field and Function of the Negro College." However, its essence still rings true even for these days. From the above quote I drew the title of my first discourse on the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, Future In Our Hands. It is also where I selected the title of this discourse (written as a memoir) about the Learning Center's Telecommunication Hub (Telehub) Network.

In the first part of this memoir I discuss how the Telehub Network came about. And the appearance of versions of the word "step" in the titles connotes this. In the later part I engage in reflections, introspections and projections pertaining to its purpose, motivations and possibilities. All-in-all, I hope to show how the Telehub evolved (as did the DuBois Learning Center itself) from the desires of African Americans "who knew themselves" and were comfortable and confident enough in their abilities, skills and talents to initiate the actions that could quite possibly help lead to the World Of Our Dreams.

From small seeds, tall oak trees grow. This is also true for organizations and systems. The Telehub Network project of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center (DLC) is an example of this phenomenon. It began as a germ of an idea, which in turn led to the seed of a concept, which eventually grew into the tree of an institution. One of the branches of that tree is the DLC's Telehub Network.

At the time of the Telehub's inception, the Learning Center had been in operation for over twenty years. Both the DLC and the Telehub Network were initiated and developed by utilizing a network of friends, family, co-workers, etc., as will be shown. And as it grew, it attracted others desiring to participate. In this endeavor I hope to illustrate that old adage that "you organize people around projects." And that those projects should be something that people need and/or want. That being said, I think it would be best if I begin this memoir with how I was led to help with the planting and nurturing of the Learning Center's seed.

In the fall of 1965 I was hired by the then Bendix Corporation as an industrial mathematician. My official title, however, was that of a scientific programmer. A few years later Vern Glover was hired as a commercial programmer. We had both graduated from Historically Black Colleges. Glover was a mathematics major from Arkansas AM & N, now renamed the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. I had earned two degrees, a bachelor's and a master's, in mathematics from Texas Southern University. (In those

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years, very few colleges even offered courses in any computer related areas, let alone degrees. Corporations typically converted employees who had degrees in subjects requiring math usage into scientific programmers, and those who had degrees in business related areas into commercial programmers.)

Glover and I had attended college in the heat of the Civil Rights Movement and often discussed how we could give back to the community. I can recall Glover expressly stating to me: "Dick, we have to do something with our kids. We have to start by working with them!" A few years later I would call upon Glover, reminding him of that comment.

While I was in college, I became interested in getting a PhD and teaching in one of our Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU). However, illness caused me to alter my plans and I ended up back in my hometown of Kansas City, Missouri. Now that I was living comfortably back home,

I began developing an interest in working with the Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD) to help them improve the mathematics education of their students. After all, many of them were members of families that I had grown up with, including my own. The district had come up with what I thought was a novel way of organizing its elementary school math and science approaches. It reasoned that the elementary school teachers teach to their strengths. So why not identify the teachers in each of its elementary schools who considered math and science their strengths. And then designate them as the Math/Science coordinators for their respective schools, thereby making it possible for them to assist their fellow teachers who were not as strong in those areas as they were.

My former high school basketball coach, the late Perry Kirkpatrick, was then head of secondary education for the district. I asked him if it was possible for me to make a presentation to the Math/Science coordinators. He helped make the arrangement for that to happen. After my presentation, they voted unanimously for me to come back once a month and work with them. They would try out my suggestions during the month and then we would come together and discuss how they went. I told them that my participation would not cost the district anything because my job would allow me to participate on a monthly basis as a contribution to education in the city.

But before it could even get started, a discrimination lawsuit was filed against the KCMSD that caused it to abandon the project so that it could concentrate all of its energies into that lawsuit. All of that planning was scrapped and thrown down the drain. Needless to say how frustrated I was at that lost opportunity. It was also illustrative of what happens when you have little or no control over the responses to influencing events and outside forces. Now I had no choice but to focus my energies in another direction.

During that same time an energetic young man named Emmanuel Cleaver had been hired by Bendix also. He had just graduated from Prairie View A&M University in sociology and worked in the planning area. He, Glover and I (among other HBCU graduates) had developed friendships and would often get together and compare collegiate experiences.

In 1968 a riot broke out in KC's African American community after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And the directors of the YMCA of Greater Kansas City decided they wanted to do something to address the needs of KC's urban core by establishing an Urban Services Branch. They had approached Cleaver to be its

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executive director. Cleaver approached me to join their board of directors so that I could help him develop and implement plans and projects to address those needs. While there, Cleaver arranged for Dr. Ralph Abernathy to come to KC and speak at a YMCA program. Rev. Abernathy was so impressed with Cleaver that he encouraged him to set up a Kansas City chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He talked it over with me and I too thought it would be a good idea.

By then [end of 1968] I was beginning to feel that we could do more for our community within a community based organization that we had more influence over. We could do things the way we felt best, without having to always seek out approval from others whose understanding of our community was not as in-depth as ours. (This is a theme that would play out later within the DLC.)

After the Kansas City chapter of SCLC was established, Cleaver recruited the late Rev. John Preciphs to join. Rev. Preciphs was, like Rev. Abernathy, impressed with Cleaver and in turn recruited him to join the ministry. In 1973 I approached the SCLC board about establishing a mathematics tutorial program to be conducted in the now Reverend Cleaver's church, St. James Gregory United Methodists. (Roy Brown, a recent Southern University electrical engineering graduate, had been hired into the department at Bendix in which I worked. He readily joined with me in our tutoring sessions.

And Robert McKinnie, a Tennessee State University electrical engineering graduate was hired by Bendix a year later and has been with us every since.) After holding a few classes and realizing the potential of what was happening, I contacted Glover, who was then employed by the US Dept. of Agriculture (DOA), about joining with our efforts, reminding him of the previous comments he had made about working with our youth.

We were conducting our tutorial sessions on Saturday mornings. Glover showed up the Saturday morning subsequent to our conversation and has been working with our kids ever since.

The reading program had begun even before the math program had started up. Two community activists named Bill Grace, who also worked at Central High School in Kansas City, and Leon Clanton had established a reading tutorial program that operated out of the Paseo United Methodist Church, where Rev. Preciph pastored. Grace had been using W.E.B. DuBois's book, The Souls of Black Folks while working with his charges. He was so impressed by that work that he named their endeavor, the W.E.B. DuBois Reading Center. At Rev. Preciph's urging, we eventually joined our two efforts, which we renamed the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center so that we would not have to undergo any other name changes due to other areas we may incorporate.

There were two different approaches to the way each of the programs was run. The reading program operated with the traditional methods (especially the ones that followed the culture that grew out of the "Great Society") by soliciting grants and hiring persons to work in it. We in the mathematics program relied on volunteers that we knew and worked with in the corporations. The churches let us use their classrooms in which they taught Sunday school to teach math on Saturdays and reading during weekdays. Since the math section relied on area professionals who were reasonably well paid, we could also rely on them to volunteer. Thereby we could operate, based upon what we ourselves could contribute. After a while the reading program adopted this method of operating also. This, in turn, would lead to a "culture" within the Learning Center that would later on lead to the establishment of the Telehub Network.

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In the reading of this memoir you will notice that I freely draw parallels, lessons, and even insights from music that emanates from our culture. Witness the chapter titles, and even the title of this prelude. Much of our music has traditionally been renowned for its dual meanings containing concealed messages. (For example: Harriet Tubman was regularly referred to as "the old ship of Zion," and those enslaved persons who were planning to escape knew full well what

"get on board" meant.) Herein I admittedly take the liberty of invoking an author's privilege of extracting similar allegories.

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Andrea Martin is one of hip-hop's most notable lyricists. She may not be that well known by the general public, but you can rest assured that she is well known and respected among the conscientious artists throughout the hip-hop community. She has only one CD that I know of: "The Best of Me." On it she has a song entitled "Steppin'." It includes the following lines:

How long is too long to wait

for the man of my dreams to come and take me away?

Promises are made to be broken. ...

I guess this is a lesson that is messing with my mind.

I got to be leaving. 'Cause for your love I'm blind.

I'll be steppin' 'cause I won't be hurt this time.

Clearly she is writing about a lost love. But for me, I chose to take this as a metaphor for a condition of life that we have long longed for, like "freedom, justice and equality," or even "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." For me "the man of our dreams" is a metaphor for a messianic leader. You know, like someone that can lead us to the Promised Land. But looking back over our sojourn, in this land, we should have learned this "lesson that has been messing with our minds."

She goes on to express what she plans to do about her unrequited love. And Continuing with the metaphor: IT takes extraordinary insight to realize that you have been or are blinded by a concept, or something you believe in, that You hold dear. And it takes even more extraordinary inner strength to conjure up the fortitude to leave, or alter Your course of action in order to achieve your desired vision

And furthermore, it is folly to expect a "man of our dreams to come and take us away," let alone wait for it. If we want to venture into the Promised Land we will have to show some initiative ourselves. If we don't want to continue to be hurt, we will have to step (move) out on our own (or as Janet Jackson intimated, we need to take "control").

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In a sense, this is the sentiment and mindset that led us to establish the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center back in 1973. We felt that we had the talent and expertise to supplement the education of our youth. And we wanted to be able to do it by using some culturally related approaches as we saw fit. I discussed, in more detail, how this was done from the DLC's beginning through its first fifteen years in the book, Future In Our

Hands. However, in this offering I will focus on how our “Telecommunications Hub” (Telehub) Network was conceived and cultivated -- in order to address the evolving concerns arising from the Information Age --and how it bore fruit.

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Chapter One: Seven Steps to Heaven

It has been said that card games are more reflective of life than board games. This is because with board games everything is on the table for everyone to see. There are no surprise holdings, and nothing left to chance. It is all about strategy and wit. In card games, the element of chance is involved with regard to the cards you are dealt. In bridge or whist, for example, no one else knows what is in your hand, neither your partner nor your opponents. If you try to finesse your opponents, you also run the risk of misleading your partner. Anything you communicate with your partner, your opponents can observe also. All in all, card games unfold much like life itself. (It should also be noted that many of the world’s leaders, both past and present from various walks of life, are well versed in the card games.)

As individuals, organizations and institutions proceed through their lives, both logic and luck (good and bad) are involved. And both of these dynamics played a part in the series of steps that led to the establishment and evolution of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center’s Telecommunications Hub (Telehub) Network.

As I look back over the years, reflecting on how the Telehub Network came about, I often find myself drawn to musing on thoughts of “Seven Steps to Heaven.



“Seven Steps to Heaven” is one of the classic tunes by Miles Davis. It is on his album of the same title. In it a recurring refrain is played that has seven prominent notes, with the last three played in a rapid succession.

It seems as though development of the DLC’s Telehub Network played out in a similar fashion.



[Step 1: The Survey]

It was on a brisk autumn Saturday afternoon in 1982 that Lisa Bond and Cornell Perry, Jr., two students of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center (DLC), met with two of the Center’s instructors, Ajamu Webster and Michael Brian, both young engineers in their twenties at the time—Webster was a civil and

Brian was a mechanical engineer. They all gathered there to survey the acreage containing the building that was to eventually become the property of the Center. SNIP

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The best way to acquire knowledge is to be around it. Lisa and Cornell, Jr. continued attending mathematics session at the Learning Center throughout their high school years. It is noteworthy to point out that Cornell, Jr. had been tutored Algebra I by Robert McKinnie, an electrical engineering graduate from Tennessee State University. When Lisa was in Algebra I, Brigida Hall (who would soon marry her college sweetheart Terrance Goree, an accountant) tutored her. Hall was a mechanical engineering graduate from Southern University. Both Hall and McKinnie were employed at the Bendix Corp. SNIP

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[Step 2: The Property Acquisition]

The W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center had been operating out of churches since its founding in 1973. It was tutoring school-aged children in math, reading and science. It had moved the math sessions to the building operated by Freedom Inc. in 1982. Beginning with the 1985–86 school year, all of its tutoring sessions were moved to the facility it had now acquired. SNIP

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[Step 3: The Computer Lab]

By the mid 1980's computer technology was beginning to work its way into the public's consciousness. The country was getting increasingly concerned about its ability to graduate more of its youth, especially inner-city youth, who were literate in mathematics, science and now computer technology. The Allied Signal Aerospace Corp. (which had bought out Bendix) established a Challenge 2000 program to address this concern. It seemed as though the requirements were written with the DuBois Learning Center in mind.

Allied Signal's president, Louis Smith (whom I had become friends with when he was first hired) was familiar with the DLC and was helpful in securing a grant for \$25,000 to help it establish a computer laboratory. Jimmie Banks (whom I also became friends with when he too was first hired) was assigned to coordinate the task.

The establishment of the computer lab raised the DLC's operation to newer heights. Danita Brewer, a chemical engineer who tutored geometry, offered to head up The computer section. Keith Rainey, our chief financial officer and avid computer user also took on some of the responsibility for setting up and running the lab. So now the

DLC had a Computer Department in addition to its Math, Reading and Science Departments. The science department was established by the late Joshua Salary, a chemistry graduate from Alabama State A&M University, who also ran the chemistry Laboratory at Bendix.

People have always been curious as to how the Learning Center has been able to acquire the volunteers for its programs. It's a little bit like "build it and they will come." However, a comment that Rev. Herbert Daughtry, the former chairman of the National Black United Front, made is even more definitive of the dynamic. What he pointed out was that "People don't join organizations—people join people."

[Step 4: The Internet Protocol]

Many times new ideas for new directions result from casual conversations. One such idea resulted from a casual conversation I had with Harrison May. During that casual discussion, I remember telling him how we originally felt as though the Learning Center concept would catch on in the community, and that there would be several of them in our churches. But that did not happen. **Harrison then said to me, "I know how we can do it." I gave him a puzzling look. He began explaining various ways how the Learning Center could take advantage of the Internet and Information Technology to benefit the work we were trying to do with our kids and the community.** From what he was expressing I was moved to ask, "Do you know how to administer an Internet network?" "Yeah," he answered. "Wait a minute." I said as I pondered. "You mean to tell me that if we had the equipment to offer an Internet, -Email and website service, you know how to run it?" "Yeah," he replied.

My head was buzzing. I began to think about what all this could lead to and what needed to be done to establish such a capability within the Learning Center. I first talked it over with Vern Glover, the vice chairman of the DLC and now the director of Information Technology for the Department of Agriculture in Kansas City. He thought that it was something we could do, and should do, especially if we had someone who could oversee it.

He then took it upon himself to talk with Harrison. After their conversation, in which they exchanged comments on Information Technology, Glover, with flaring and piercing eyes, later exclaimed to me: "Dick, I'd hire him in a heartbeat!"

The other "tech" folks at the DLC were easily convinced that we should take this project on. My concern was convincing the "non-tech" folks. There wasn't enough time to do an all out sells job. It would just take too long to get them to understand all of this Internet "tech" stuff at that time. **So, I went to my old buddy, Bill Grace and simply said: "Grace, you're just going to have to go along with us on this. I know you don't really understand**

what all we are talking about. But it's like what that old Negro spiritual says, "You'll understand it better by and by."

This same comment was made to the other DLC non-tech folks. The DLC was fortunate that the non-tech folks had such confidence in us tech folks to go along with a proposition like this, especially since we were so gung-ho about it.

The question now was: How were we going to go about obtaining the resources to proceed?

ENTER THE [MILLION MAN MARCH](#) (MMM)! [October 1995]

Many of the Learning Center's prime movers were also prime movers in the Kansas City chapter of the [National Black](#)

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United Front (NBUF) -- including charter members Bill Grace; Ajamu Webster, now the chairman of the KC chapter, and me. NBUF -- KC was active in the organization of the MMM in Kansas City. Before the MMM was held, there had been a contentious school board election pitting NBUF-KC members against some of the members of Freedom, Inc. But after the election was all over, and given the spirit around the concept of the March, several members of Freedom, Inc. decided to attend the MMM. As a result of the camaraderie that was established, the Freedom and NBUF members desired to come together so that they could better benefit our community. The Chairman of Freedom, Inc., Rev. James Tindall, approached the NBUF guys to see how we could work together. They told him of the goals and aspirations of the Center's Telehub Network project. Rev. Tindall then informed them about some monies available where the resources could be obtained to implement the desired project we were seeking to pull together.

The W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center now decided to proceed, full - stem - ahead, with the project.

[Step 5: The Coming of Key Talent] (late 95-early 96)

The Learning Center's initial objectives were to be able to host web pages for Community-based organizations and provide e-mail capabilities to staffers and students. Earl Baker an old childhood friend of mine and a long time DLC supporter, spoke to one of his acquaintances, Gary Gorman, about the project. Gorman was a self-starter who had a keen interest in learning more about what was going on with Information Technology (IT). At that time he was unemployed, and began to work closely with Harrison and quickly began developing his understanding of the technology. This would later enable to him find work in this field. Gary worked hand in hand with Harrison in the initial phases to get things up and running. One-by-one we began to host

web pages for various churches, community organizations, and some community based businesses. It is interesting to note that one such business, Leon's Supermarket, had a surprising and pleasant experience as a result.

I had known the owners, Leon Stapleton and his wife Willosa, whom I had worked with in a local supermarket while I was a high school teenager. Even they didn't know that much about the Internet at that time (mid nineties). However, they went along with the idea of us developing and hosting a web presence for them. One day while I was in the store, Leon told me that he had received a long distance call from a representative of a national organization of Black supermarket owners. He asked Leon how long had he been in business. To which he answered, "since 1968." When he told him that, the caller said that he was "the Jackie Robinson" of Black supermarket owners and that he had been in business longer than all of their members. Leon was invited to attend their convention where he received a special recognition.

Little by little, things began to take shape and grow.

With our growth came the need for more support and help. Recall that I mentioned some support for us that resulted from the Million Man March (MMM). Also in that March were two "brothers" who would join us, Ronald Craddolph, Jr. and Christopher "Chris" Thompson.

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Ajamu Webster had by this time established his own civil and structural engineering firm, DuBOIS Consultants, Inc., that was located down the street from the Learning Center. Kevin Perry, who was a former president of the Black Chamber of Commerce, had his Information Technology business, Newspaper Electronics, housed in the DuBOIS Consultant's office building. Ron, Kevin and Ajamu all knew each other from their association in Kansas City's Black Chamber of Commerce. Ron went on the MMM and engaged in dialogue with them. There he learned about the happenings at the DLC. Upon his return from the March, he decided to follow up on Webster's suggestion to call me. I can recall aspects of that conversation when I found out about Ron's background in IT and that he was a business manager at SBC. I proceeded to tell him about Harrison and that he would be able to follow his conversations about what the Center was doing, although most of the people Harrison tried to explain things to got lost in that technological jargon that he inevitably would lapse into. Ron would later remark that he "couldn't wait to meet this brother that nobody could talk to."

Ron and Harrison hit it off very well. They became quite a team. They began to develop IT classes to teach to youth as well as adults. I had also been studying how to develop web pages that would enabled me to contribute in that regard. However, the way things were at that time, I had to e-mail my work to Harrison and he would post it. Needless to say that Harrison soon

tired of that additional work. So he searched and found some software that would allow me to upload the pages that I would write to the server myself. He and Ron went through it, familiarizing themselves with its operations. Ron then proceeded to show me how to operate it. When I saw how easy it was to operate, I said to Ron, with Harrison in earshot, "You mean that I can upload my web pages from home as simple as this?" "Yep," he smilingly said. I leaned back smiling and said: "I'm dangerous now. Y'all don't know what y'all just did. I know what to put out there on our website." They just laughed. And I thought to myself, "I don't think they know what they have just unleashed." "That's what we want you to do." Ron Said. "Have fun." In hindsight

I realize that they simply wanted me out of their hair. Now as for Chris Thompson. Chris attended Southeast High School with both Harrison and Keith Rainey. He was two years behind them. Chris' and Harrison's fathers knew each other from childhood. Chris worked at one time with Mickey Dean who was the director of Human Resources for Kansas City, Missouri, a NBUF-KC member math at the Center. Chris by then had become a manager of Human Resources for Sprint, the telecommunications corporation whose headquarters are in the Greater Kansas City Area.

At Mickey Dean's suggestion, Chris attended the Million Man March. There he too experienced the camaraderie and spirit of the MMM. Although Mickey had been trying to get him to visit the Learning Center previously, Chris now felt the urgency to become more involved with the community. So he decided that he should follow up on Mickey's suggestion. Almost as soon as he got there, he and Harrison began talking and exchanging thoughts and ideas. They would continue with this kind of dialogue whenever Chris came to the Center. At one point, in one of his visits, in one of their conversations Harrison broke in and said, "Why don't you get Sprint to give us a T1 line?" To which Chris replied, "Write me a proposal." Chris should have known better

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than to ask Harrison that! But he was serious about him writing a proposal. Harrison got to work. After Harrison presented him with his proposal, Chris got busy setting things in motion.

[Step 6: The Internet Service Provider]

Chris Thompson would often say to me that I probably knew his father, Willie Thompson. And I would always tell him that I couldn't recall a Willie Thompson. Then one day he referred to him as "Weasel." I blurted out, "Weasel?" I told him that "everybody in town knows Weasel. Your daddy was one of those guys that everybody knows, but nobody knows his name." Weasel was a popular, athletic, street-wise person.

For a time he worked as a barber in one of Kansas City's most popular hair saloons, the Sportsmen House of Coiffeurs (owned by Ralph Brown, a long time Learning Center supporter). His presence there was as entertaining as it was engaging. Chris often talks about how his father would always discuss life experiences, sharing his folk wisdom and knowledge with him. Chris seems to have inherited his people skills from his father. He seems to have employed them as he set about trying to interest the appropriate people at Sprint in giving some consideration to Harrison's proposal. Chris was able to set up a meeting with Bill Washington, Sprint's Human Relations manager (?), so that we could make a presentation.

The persons chosen to make the presentation were Ron Craddolph, Harrison May and myself. Now Ron is a person who has that innate ability to deliver a smooth, clear presentation. Therefore he was designated to be the main presenter. Harrison, who is quick witted and known to give concise answers, was to provide technical backup support. And I was there to provide background information on the workings of the DLC. With our Power Point presentation we spelled out how we would, using wireless technology, like to:

1. Provide Internet access for our community by establishing satellite centers in area churches and community centers.
2. Provide access to software housed on the servers at the DLC to the satellite centers by for their use.
3. Free-up the satellite centers from the responsibility of having to obtain, maintain and upgrade hardware and software.

We had big dreams. We would, in effect, become an Applications Service Provider (ASP). We wanted to establish five centers in the first phase, around fifteen in the second and eventually get up to about fifty or sixty in the third. After we finished with our presentation, Bill Washington leaned back in his chair and said that what we were talking about was a huge project. It would require about three million- dollars to accomplish it. This concept would require more than what Sprint alone could do and that we would have to engage other corporate sponsors.

Things just don't always go smoothly. Bill Grace, cofounder and executive director of the DLC, has always been a community activist. And as such he has ruffled a few feathers of some influential civic leaders. However, we all knew what he was like

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and how his intense interest in community affairs fuelled his activism. And we were comfortable with that as many of us shared his concerns and some of us even shared his activism. He and I were members of NBUF, along with a few others. Grace was clearly the most visible, although he considered

himself switching hats as he engaged in community activism on one hand and functioned as the DLC executive director on the other.

While things were proceeding along, gathering interest for the project, Bill Washington retired from Sprint. Chris now began talking to Dave Thomas, Sprint's director of their foundation for community relations. ***Dave was aware of Grace's activism and like many members of Kansas City's civic leaders, he had some reservations about becoming involved with an organization with the likes of Bill Grace in the leadership. Up to his point we were a grassroots organization and didn't much rely on too much support from sources outside of our community. Now, however, with this project, we were moving up to another level. We knew we were going to have to do some marketing of our efforts outside of our immediate community.***

Now Sprint had set up a call-center inside the urban core near the famous location of 18th and Vine. The lady who was in charge of it was a friend of Bill Grace. She had turned to him to help her set up training programs and procedures. Grace, always willing to help someone trying to do something that will benefit our community, rose to the occasion. We put the word out so that it would be known to the folks at Sprint how Grace unselfishly, quietly behind the scenes did things that in turn benefited Sprint's efforts to establish their call-center. In addition to that, we talked with **Jerry McEvoy, the coordinator of the Upper Room, a program that is housed in the St. Louis Catholic Church that would be a beneficiary of our project.** He knew an official in Sprint's financial management and let her know about the good works of the DLC and how this project could allow for even more blessings to flow to the community by enabling the various participating centers to offer more in their programs and projects. He also informed her of how he and Bill Grace worked cooperatively together in their neighborhood organization, [The Swope Corridor Renaissance](#). [opened in 1999] However, there was one incident that seemed to be the icing on the cake. Rev. Ralph Crabbe, of Christ the Redeemer African Methodist Episcopal Church, was an avid DLC supporter. Roy Brown, one of his members who tutored math for us in our formative years, had informed him of the DLC. Roy encouraged him to meet with us when he expressed an interest in their church establishing an education outreach program. After we met and I shared some of our concepts with him, we established an ongoing relationship.

Rev. Crabbe was also highly involved in community and civic activities. He had a good relationship with Dave Thomas and invited him to lunch to discuss our project. In the discussion, Dave raised his reservations about Bill Grace. Rev. Crabbe asked him if he thought the project was workable and worthwhile. Dave replied that it was. Rev. Crabbe asked if he thought it would be beneficial to the community. Dave said that he thought it would. To which Rev. Crabbe said, "I don't care if Grace is a communist. If the project makes sense and will benefit the community you should support it."

Not long after that, Dave arranged a meeting with Grace. They hit it off real well. Grace is quite a character, but he doesn't have horns (at least not real big ones). In May

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of 1996(?) [1999 Cook Rep] the Sprint Foundation awarded the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center a \$100,000 grant to proceed with its Telecommunications Hub project.

An additional benefit of all of this came when Dave encouraged his daughter, Meredith, to pay a visit to the Learning center. It turned out that she worked with the group INROADS, that engaged in community activities. When she became aware that we could use some help with our enrollment, she sent out e-mails to their alumni. One of them who offered to help out was Brandy Lane, a chemical engineering graduate of North Carolina A&T University employed at Aventis Pharmaceuticals. When Bill Grace found out about her background, he told her that our science program was dormant due to the fact the former head, Charles McField, had left town in order to pursue studies to become a minister. Upon hearing that, Brandy readily agreed to help us get our science program up and running again. Needless to say how thrilled we were to have her. It also turned out that we had helped her brother, Eddie R. Lane III, to obtain a scholarship to Prairie View A&M University, where he graduated in electrical engineering. Moreover it turned out also that her mother, Marilyn Hill, worked as an administrator at Knotts Elementary School where my wife Betty Dixon, was a school nurse. So when Brandy came on board she was welcomed with open arms.

[Step 7: The Community IT Network]

There is an old saying that "You have to play the hand that's dealt you." It is also often expressed in the saying that "you have go with what you got."

Earl Baker is one of those persons that are eternal optimists and have a winning way with people. He has an unbelievable network of friends and acquaintances throughout the greater Kansas City area. As he would pass by the building he would see our sign in the yard and wonder what was going on at the Learning Center. One day he decided to drop in. That's how he first came to the Center. Upon seeing him we began to bring each other up on old times. As he learned what the Center was about, he decided to become involved with us.

As mentioned earlier, Earl belongs to the St. Louis Catholic Church, which is up the street from the Center. Jerry McEvoy, who is over their community outreach, was working on an educational outreach program. The foundation from which they were seeking funds wanted them to check to see if other organizations in the community were doing anything similar. As it turned out, the United Christian Church up the street from them, Covenant Presbyterian Church across the street from them, and the Swope Parkway Church of

Christ down the street from them were all doing education activities. Earl brought Jerry to the Learning Center so that he could become aware of our work. And that's how we got to know him.

What resulted from all of this was the formation of a community-based organization, **The Swope Corridor Renaissance (SCR)**. It was composed of churches, businesses, neighborhood organizations, community based organizations that were operating in our general area of the city. We came together so that we could better work together and for mutual support.

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All of these organizations in the SCR were happy for us when received the \$100,000 grant from the Sprint Foundation. However, Harrison had hoped for \$500,000 to accomplish all he had in mind in his original proposal for the first phase of the project. As we sat in our computer lab to discuss the project, Harrison said, "What can we do with only \$100,000?" I answered that we would just have to scale down our plans to something more simple and demonstrate to the community what we are trying to do. Because of our involvement in SCR we already had some churches that were familiar with what we sought to do and wanted to participate. So now we began to set our plan in action.

We assembled a team of professional electricians who worked in setting up the Information Technology wiring infrastructure procedure. They were George Fletcher, who headed up the team, and two brothers, Gerald "Jerry" and Melvin Powell. They would do a walk through of each facility to determine what was needed to best prepare them to be brought onto our Network. The churches were asked to designate some of the youth in their congregations so that we could train them to do the wiring and cabling to network and prepare their facilities to receive the signal from an antenna to be placed atop the Learning Center.

Starting in early June when school was out, George would train them for two weeks in the evenings. Upon completion they would go and wire the churches, which took about another two weeks. Harrison and Ron would constantly monitor the progress of the students' wiring. They installed the software that ran the network and the applications software for the users. They continuously tested the connections and configured the servers. Their responsibility was to be the system administrators for the Network. They were like Duke and Count, "orchestrating" the process.

In the midst of these preparations, Tracy Chatman, one of the first students who we tutored at the Learning Center, called me about helping her church set up a tutoring program. We arranged for her and some members of her church's education committee to meet with us. During that meeting she discovered our plans for establishing our Telecommunications Hub. She got in touch with me later and said that she would like to work with us on the project. Tracy had been working in data processing and saw an interesting

opportunity to give back to the community. She became our administrative assistant for the "Telehub" project.

As I recall, I was spending a quiet and peaceful evening, relaxing at home, when my phone rang. It was Tracy. She was excited and happily laughing while telling me that Harrison was ecstatic. I could feel the joy as she told me, "His Network is up and running!"

Chapter Two: Giant Steps

Little did most folks know just how much the Information Technology explosion would accelerate in the mid 90's. However, those of us who worked with this technology had some insight into its promises as well as the shape of things to come.

Those of us at the Learning Center first simply wanted to be able to host web pages and to try to enable our community to take advantage of the various uses of the Internet. We knew we couldn't compete with the "big boys" when it came to being an Internet Service Provider. So we simply sought to teach classes in computer/Internet technology, including web page designing & maintaining, and to host web pages of community business, churches, and organizations, etc. However, even these modest ambitions would lead to promising opportunities to take advantage of that could lead to growth potential for the Learning Center.

For example, one of the web pages we hosted for a while was for "Willa's Books." Lisa Cole, was Willa Robinson's niece and was maintaining her web site. Lisa was a computer science and business teacher at Hickman Mills High School. One evening, in one of our sessions on designing web pages, I was showing her how use the software that would enable her to upload web pages onto our server from her home. Bill Grace walked in all excited, telling me about the "brother" who worked at General Electric that had asked him, "What could you do with ten thousand dollars?" Grace went on to say that his name was Phil Cole and that he was a manager in human resources at GE. I looked at him smilingly and said, "This is his wife right here."

When Phil came to one of our staff meetings he was sitting near me and remarked that he was amazed to see this many highly skilled African Americans working together, volunteering their time and talent, to benefit our community. (We have heard similar comments from several others!) He said that he wanted to get more involved with us and see what he could do to help us out. Phil worked with us to secure a \$20,000 grant from the General Electric Foundation to enable us to rehabilitate one of the wings of the Learning Center and turn it into a better-equipped computer lab.

In our old computer lab, that we now call "lab one," we had our web-hosting

server in an old converted closet. We had realized earlier the need to upgrade our server space and wanted to convert a larger room for that purpose. After receiving the grant from General Electric, we were able to refurbish and upgrade an entire wing, which we dubbed "lab two."

Another web page we hosted for a while was for The Black Archives of Mid-America. We hosted their page until the Kansas City Library Association awarded them a grant to develop and host a site. The person assigned to develop it was Elonda Clay. She contacted us so that we could share with her what we had done. She liked what we were doing at the DLC and when the project was finished she volunteered to work with us. She developed a page for us to give information to students interested in going to college (www.duboislrc.org/College/guide.html).

Meanwhile, Earl Baker had talked with Robert Cooper (whom he had known as a child) about taking our web page designing class. Cooper is the son of the late "Big John" Cooper, who ran a local pool hall. As a consequence Robert grew up to be

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exceptionally streetwise. (Incidentally, his father gave him strict orders to never bet against Earl in a pool game. He told him that Earl Baker was one of the best pool shooters in town and that there were very few people who could beat him.) He was also a computer science major while attending Central Missouri State College. After being called to the army, he was sent on a tour in Viet Nam. Cooper was able to avoid combat duties, he says, "because of the skills he acquired while in college." And he was assigned office duties because of the shortage of personnel with the skills for that kind of work.

When Elonda Clay acquired further employment that put demands on her time that prevented her from continuing with her work with us, Robert Cooper stepped in to take over her responsibilities. All in all, things were continuing to look up for us. But little did we know how much things were really going to change. We entered into what we dubbed our "first phase" with a passion. The plan, mentioned earlier, was to ask each church to designate some of its youth for us to train how to run cables and prepare their church for receiving a wireless signal from the Learning Center that would enable them to access software on our servers as well as have access to the Internet.

The first church we wired up was the Swope Parkway Church of Christ, which was located across the street from us. Rev. Gerald McGill, and his wife Gloria, would become some of the most ardent supporters of our "Telehub Network." Recall that George Fletcher, a professional electrician with an expertise in running cables, trained the students, along with some interested adults during the evenings after school. And that he was ably assisted by the Powell brothers,

Jerry and Melvin, who also had expertise in this field. After two weeks of training the crew would go to work prepping the church.

After finishing the Church of Christ, the process was started again with St. Louis Catholic Church, up the street from the DLC. Next we did Covenant Presbyterian Church, across the street from St. Louis Catholic Church, and its cabin next door to it, used by its Boy Scout troop. Then we followed up with the Swope Park United Christian Church, a block up the street from St. Louis, and finally the Bridge Home for Boys, located across the street from the United Christian Church. That gave us five sites in all. However, the churches were the primary sites. But because we had prepared a cluster of sites, we were able to cut some expenses by buying in bulk. And also because we were saving some money by using students, we were able to stretch our recourses to wire up more sites than we had originally planned. That is how we were able to include the scout cabin and the boy's home in our initial phase.

In the midst of wiring Covenant Presbyterian Church, Harrison met George Walker, a senior manager of engineering maintenance for SBC. Upon finding out about his technological background, Harrison encouraged him to become involved with us, especially in the youth training aspect. It was a good thing too, because George Fletcher was becoming too stretched out in training the students and then taking them on the site to do the wiring. So the two Georges, put their heads together and came up with the strategy for George Walker to do the training while George Fletcher and the Powell Brothers would take the students that had been trained and do the wiring.

When the work was all finished we had a ceremony, rewarding the students who participated in the wiring project. Walter May, Harrison's father, worked for Gateway Computers at the time. He had talked to the owner about what was taking place with the

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kids wiring up their churches. Gateway made a donation of \$5,000 to the project to reward the students. We had kept track of the hours they had put in and divided them into the \$5000 to give the students a surprise stipend.

We had a vision that this endeavor of wiring facilities to access our servers via the Internet could lead to a for-profit operation. The vision was to continue to wire up churches and non-profit organizations through the grants we received, but we would wire up business for a fee. The students, who acquired this experience and really did a good job, would be the ones we would offer to hire for the business wiring jobs. This would enable us to offer some of our youth part time employment.

With that in mind, and since George Fletcher and the Powell brothers would be the ones in charge of this aspect of the operation, we decided that we should pay them for their services. However, they contributed much more to the project than what we were able to compensate them for.

But that is not all of the behind-the-scenes activities and coordination that was being done. Little-by-little a team was coming together, forming a relationship that would make the Telehub project a wonder to behold.

Recall also that Tracy Chatman, who had come to the Center to see about acquiring information to help her church set up after school programs, had joined the Telehub section in the capacity of helping coordinate the purchasing of equipment needed for the wiring and setting up business plans for conducting the operation. She had become the Telehub's overall girl Friday.

In addition to Tracy's participation there was that of Joyce Gant. Joyce had brought her son to be tutored in mathematics at the Center. During the orientation she learned of the Telehub Network project. She told us about her background in computer science, and that she worked at Aventis Pharmaceuticals. She became involved in organizing the coordinators of the Telehub satellites. Her role was to help them understand how to use the infrastructure that we had put in place and how to use it to operate the various activities they had going on, especially the ones involving education.

The Black Data Professionals Association (BDPA) is an organization consisting of African Americans who work in the various Information Technology fields. We had developed a relationship with them for several years. They would use our facility to train area youth in Information Technology for their annual contest hosted at their convention. After we had established our Telehub Network, they invited us to make a presentation to their group. Ron Craddolph, Harrison May, and I were again called to perform the task. Many of their members expressed an interest in working with us. However, there was one young man in particular, Aaron Brooks, who quietly sat there during the entire presentation. After it was over he expressed to Harrison that he wanted to get to know more about the inner workings of our Telehub Network. Aaron became a protégé of Harrison, as well as his right-hand man, when it came to maintaining the operation of the infrastructure of the network—working with the servers in particular. At that time Aaron had not finished college, but all of us encouraged him to complete his education, which he eventually did.

Also, James Banks of BDPA worked with us to develop a relationship with the Microsoft Educational Foundation. As a result of his support, in addition to the contacts

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that Harrison May had with them, Microsoft donated to us the software to

enable us to offer their Office Suite to the users in all of our satellites.

And then there was Carmen Witherspoon. She is married to Ralph Brown, the owner of Sportsmen's House of Coiffures (where Chris Thompson's father, "Weasel" had worked). Ralph and I were in high school together. He has been an avid supporter of the Learning Center from our early beginnings. Carmen also worked with Joyce at Aventis. Carmen took on the responsibility of organizing our storage facility for all of our technology hardware. She would make sure that the equipment and supplies were together and ready for the wiring at the sites.

Shirley Elliot had joined the project and took over the responsibility of office administration. She did the record keeping of the student's activities, the purchasing invoices and documents of our correspondence with business, corporations and foundations, etc. Her brother, Tim Elliot of American Foods, and Robert Mayfield of General Electric joined the computer staff and taught courses in the Microsoft office suite to both students and adults.

It was truly amazing to me to observe how all of this volunteer talent was coming together to make this project work!

By this time Harrison May had changed jobs several times. He had left Allied Signal (now Honeywell) for the House of Lloyd, then to Midwest Health Association and finally to Hallmark Cards. His position at Hallmark was in network security. Harrison was able to attract some of his fellow Hallmark associates to join in his efforts in the Learning Center's Telehub project. They were John "Jay" Williams, who was in network security with Harrison, Moné Jones and Calvin Robinson, both computer science majors who worked in web-page design. All three are proud graduates of North Carolina A&T University.

Even before we began these activities, Harrison would quietly say that monies were going to flow into the Center as a result of the telecommunications operational infrastructure that we were setting up. After the Sprint grant we began to apply for others.

First we had our eyes on a U.S Department of Commerce matching grant for \$900,000. We went to great pains trying to submit a proposal for it. We went to conferences and even consulted people we knew to help us write up a convincing case for us. At the same time we got wind of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education for \$300,000. So we decided that we might as well apply for that one too. As things turned out, the Dept of Commerce turned us down, but we did receive the grant from the Dept. of Education.

Now things were really going to change and change quickly. I would often say that it takes about three to five years before a new volunteer would become comfortable enough at the Learning Center to become self assertive. I remember stating in a staff meeting that we were getting ready to go

through some trying times. We had no one to look to for guidance because we were plodding new territory. That there would be times when we were flatly going to get on each other's nerves. Normally we would have time to get to know each other and develop the techniques "as we go." This time, with the steady influx of new volunteers the Telehub project was attracting, we would not have

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that luxury. But we had no choice. We didn't have time to wait, and we would simply have to learn as we proceeded along. In order to make this project work we had to go with who and what we had. As the saying goes, "Go with what you got." And we all committed to do what we had to do, indeed what we all felt that we must do. We then embarked into what we referred to as our "second phase."

In 1993 Brian Welch married Petrice Whitiker, who tutored subtraction in our mathematics program. When she introduced him to us, and he saw the community work we were doing, he decided to join in with us. He was an accountant for the Hallmark Corp. before he set up own CPA firm, Welch & Associates. In addition to tutoring algebra and pre-algebra, he stepped up and helped us with our accounting and bookkeeping.

Upon learning of us receiving the DOE grant, Brian said that now we have to "move our accounting procedures up to a whole new level." It was time, he stated, "for me to move inside to work closer with executive and administrative aspect of the DLC." This would enable him to better oversee our financial procedures. So he stepped down from our board and we hired his firm to do our accounting. This allowed him to better oversee our financial inner workings.

The day of the presentation of the DOE grant was a joyous occasion. A representative from DOE was there along with the U.S Congress Representative, Karyn McCarthy. Missouri State Representatives Sharon Sanders Brooks and Craig Bland, Kansas City Councilman Terry Riley, and Kansas City Missouri School Board member Marilyn Simmons were present as well. And also present was the Rev. Wallace S. Hartsfield. Rev. Hartsfield is the pastor of Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church. Metropolitan is one of the largest churches in our community. And Rev. Hartsfield is one of the most highly respected ministers in the entire Greater Kansas City Area. He has always been one of our most enthusiastic supporters. When he became aware of the Telecommunications Network that we were planning to develop throughout the city, he expressed the desire to have his church participate in it with us. And they even offered to help defray some of the cost.

Rev. Hartsfield had noticed the success of our first phase and saw how both his church and the Learning Center could mutually benefit each other.

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Giant Steps is the title tune of one of John Coltrane's most noted, celebrated and groundbreaking albums. He says the name comes from the fact that "the bass line is kind of a loping one. It goes from minor thirds to fourths, kind of a lop-sided pattern in contrast to moving strictly in fourths or in half-steps."

Over the years the members of the DLC have learned to think big. And the Telehub project was proving to be no exception. There was definitely no "half-stepping" here.

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Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church is approximately three miles from the Learning Center. The twenty-foot antenna that was perched atop the Learning Center was not going to be able to reach it. For the wireless concept to work there had to be

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line-of-site connection. **So Harrison knew that we would have to resort to another strategy to reach them. He decided that we needed a large tower on which we could place a dish to be able to see a receiver at Metropolitan MBC. We ended up with a 180- foot tower, dubbed "the Beacon of Hope" by Jerry McEvoy of the Swope Corridor Renaissance.**

In order to have the tower erected, we had to go through the proper channels with City Hall. It took a whole lot of patience and wrangling working with the city bureaucrats. I continued to be amazed by the fortitude that Bill Grace exhibited in orchestrating this endeavor. The elected officials, especially the members of Freedom, Inc., readily threw in their support behind our project. But it was Bill Grace who coordinated the activity with the architects and the surveying; gathered petition signatures from neighborhood residents, churches and business, etc. to support us; and stayed on the case meeting with the bureaucracy and the other necessary parties until the job was completed.

We were pleasantly surprised when we became aware of a fortunate opportunity that Metropolitan MBC presented us. While analyzing the work to be done at there, it was discovered that the location on the roof where we wanted to place an antennae to receive the signal from the DLC that we could see the tops of other churches and centers close by that also wanted to be participate in the project. That is, from Metropolitan MBC we could relay a signal to several other potential sites. Things were really looking up for us and falling into place.

Rev. Hartsfield readily admits that he is not technologically literate. However, one day while I was at a meeting at his church, he saw me and came up to me in an excited state. He said to me, "Man, we been crowing around here."

Some of their elder members had inquired about what their kids were doing. When it was explained to them, they became excited. Rev. Hartsfield even related that the kids did not want to go home in the evenings when their parents came to pick them up. They were just that into the work that they were doing.

When we finished with Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church (MMBC) we repeated the same process with Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, located a few blocks northeast from MMBC. Also Metropolitan AME Zion is the church that Phillip and Lisa Cole attended. We also brought Salem Baptist Church, located several blocks in the other direction from MMBC and Palestine Senior Citizens Center, which is also just a few blocks southeast from MMBC. Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church became the relay point to these sites in what we refer to as the Linwood Cluster. That name was derived from the fact that MMBC is located on Linwood Blvd. in Kansas City, Missouri.

When we finished wiring up the "Linwood Cluster," we held a celebration at the Palestine Senior Citizen's Center. Joyce Gant, Carmen Witherspoon, along with Bettye Watt and Vershell Smith who had also joined the Telehub's administration team planned the activity. It featured the music of Ground Level, with Elton Gumbel—vocals and piano, Keith Leathers—bass, and Lee Barnes—drums. This is a group of conscious artists who have supported the DLC since its early years. Rev. McGill of Swope Park Church of Christ was the featured speaker. He complimented the dedication of the volunteers whose work made it all happen and pointed to all of the possibilities it held out for the future, and gave notice to the community spirit that was developing wherein

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we were all working together for our common good. In attendance also was Lewis Parker from GE, who stated that they would continue to work with and support our efforts; and (his name?), a representative from Microsoft, expressed the significance of what we had established and that they would continue to support us with donations of software.

All in all, a community spirit was developing that inspired us all. At one of the meetings that Joyce Gant was conducting, a site coordinator exclaimed that she just didn't know that much about computers and she didn't know if she was going to be able to take full advantage of the infrastructure the way that the others seemed to be able to do. At that point Chris Huff, the site coordinator for the Upper Room, said to her, "Don't worry about that sister, we got your back."

Working with these churches and their various activities that took place during the day raised the level of service to the community that the Learning Center needed to provide. We now need to have daytime support staff. We approached the Kauffman Foundation here

in Kansas City, and held discussions with them regarding our situation. They worked with us to put together a proposal for the funds to hire the necessary tech support staff.

Elton Gumbel, Jr., was a member of our reading staff who also happened to be KC's most culturally conscious lyricist. He also had some multimedia knowledge and experience, and therefore was an ideal candidate to be our systems administrator. Elton had taken a severance package from his position as a Human Resource Administrator for the Olin Corporation after 20 years at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant and was therefore available for the job. But above all, he was willing and viewed this as an opportunity to give back to the community even more so than he was already doing.

Harrison, who handled most of the system administration duties, along with his able bodied cohorts, Aaron Brown and Jay Williams, was glad to have someone like Elton to work with during the day. Elton turned out to be more than just a willing worker who was able to catch on quickly. His relationship with Grace and his knowledge of the inner workings of the DLC, allowed him to be a tremendous asset as to coordinating activity between the newly established Telehub section and the traditional DLC sections. In addition to that, he was able to assist Grace in the various writings of correspondence and proposals. All in all, it turned out to be an excellent arrangement.

As usual there are some unforeseen circumstances that need to be addressed. One such incident was with the Palestine Senior Citizen's Center. After all of the work was completed installing the network and setting up their computer lab, we noticed that the seniors were just sitting there looking at the computers. We observed that they had little knowledge as to how to use them.

Solution: Elton set up some training classes for the seniors. His father had been an optometrist in Kansas City for many years. And when he introduced himself at the beginning of the classes as Elton Gumbel, Jr., several of the seniors started tugging at their glasses. Smiles ensued as Elton was warmly received.

Another occurrence was when we notice that the connection between the Center and MMBC, while fine during the weekends, but would go down during weekdays. We

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finally realized that there must have been some signals from a business or other facility that was knocking ours out.

Solution: We put a Virtual Private Network (VPN) box in MMBC that allowed them to connect with us through the Internet. That cleared things up and allowed us to relay signals from them to the other sites in the Linwood

Cluster.

After the success of Phase Two, the DLC staff thought it would be good to recognize the Telehub Network crew for their achievements. We held the ceremony at Swope Parkway Church of Christ (SPCC), across the street from the Center. One of the main coordinators for the event was Terri Moore. She had brought her son to the Center, and decided that she would like to get involved with us. Terri worked in management for the American Century Insurance Company, and became an ideal addition to our administration staff that was both needed and welcomed.

One day while coming from a meeting at SPCC, I had an opportunity to discuss with her in more detail about what all was happening with the Telehub project. I tried to explain to her how this project could benefit our community and what some of the various possibilities were that the Telehub project enabled us to do. That, for example, when the school kids in the fourth grade and above are asked to do homework, nowadays it may be expected to be word processed. And many of the kids in the urban core don't have access to computers. But, it is said, "They can use computers in the libraries." However, there are only two here in KC's urban core. But there are churches "on every other corner." If we can strategically locate enough satellites connected to our network, many of the students could have access to the technology within walking distance.

Besides, there are an esoteric few persons in our community who are knowledgeable of this technology and its uses in our community to the extent to make this happen. But by establishing this network we can maximize their effectiveness because most of the work can be done at the Center. There the maintenance and upgrades, both of hardware and software, can take place at the DLC, freeing up the various satellites of that responsibility.

I can recall her saying that she had "no idea" of all that. From that point on she became more involved in working with the network and making more and better use of it.

It turned out that at the ceremony I happened to be sitting at the table with our guest speaker, who was Phil Curls, the former state senator. Likewise, he too had little knowledge about the various benefits of the Telehub Network to our community. Naturally I did not pass up on the opportunity to enlighten him.

He approached us about wiring up his office located in the Gates & Sons office building. (Gates & Sons have several bar-b-q restaurants throughout Greater Kansas City.) Ron Craddolph was and old friend of Phil's. The Craddolph, the Curls, and the Gates families all knew each other. So that was a natural fit. During the process, **Phil became even more knowledgeable of the benefits of the project and asked if we could make a presentation to the Missouri Black Legislatures conference to be held in Branson, Missouri. Phil arranged for Ron's and Harrison's jobs and**

SBC and Hallmark Cards, respectively, to let them off to do it. However, he began to have second thoughts as to who should make the presentation. He called me one evening asking me if I could come to the conference and be involved because he felt that Ron and Harrison were so technical that they may speak over the participants' heads. So I agreed to go.

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I was our primary presenter at the conference. But before I was halfway through it, some of the participants interrupted me and started asking questions as to how their parts of the state could get involved. Ron and Harrison both had to step up and answer many of their questions. It was an enlightening experience and hopefully the financing can be obtained to act on their requests.

All of this caused us to realize that we needed to do some mission planning. Enter Leah Russell. Leah is a manager for the U.S Department of Transportation, and has overseen multi-million dollar projects. She is also a member of the Kansas City Chapter of the National Black United Front (KCBUF). As such she was well aware of the DLC and its works. Mickey Dean, also of KCBUF, teaches math for older students needing special help. He was in desperate need of more help due to the increasing number of such students. So he approached Leah to him help out. Which she so willing did.

After Keith Rainey, our Chief Financial Officer, had to resign due to job related increase on his time, Leah was asked to join our board and become our new CFO. After joining the board, she began to realize that we needed to put together a mission statement and a paper stating our goals and objectives, especially with regard to the Telehub Network project.

She asked some acquaintances of hers, Johnnie Flemming and Romel Cooks, to facilitate the sessions. (I had originally met Johnnie and her husband Johnny at the Historical Black Colleges and Universities' local organization when it was getting started. Johnnie had gone to University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Johnny had gone to Jackson State University.)

We met several times thrashing things out. We discussed how we wanted to expand the Telehub to other parts of the city, and eventually to other parts of the country. **We discussed how we could even take a page from what some of the universities were doing. We could become incubators for businesses. It was a good brainstorming session considering where we had come from, where we were at the time, and how we could evolve to even greater heights given what we had going for us.**

But when we started to try and come up with a mission statement, things started to stall. I can recall saying, "Just let me talk for a while." I remember saying something like, "I'm thinking Coltrane. ...

I mean like—Giant Steps.”

That phrase, that concept caught on. And we kept working with it until we finally came up with the mission statement: “Creating Giant Steps Together.”

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Chapter Three: Stepping Into Tomorrow

Looking back, it is interesting to note the giant steps that can be accomplished when you have people who play to their strengths. Many times we don't even take advantage as we should of the talents we have available to us by using them as we should. And I submit that these are the things we must do if we are to take giant steps into the future.

Let us take a moment to look at one of the lessons that we can learn from the African liberation movements. One of the first things they did whenever they liberated some territory was to evaluate its natural resources. That was because those were the things that were available to them that could be used to build their economy upon.

Likewise we should evaluate the assets we have in our own communities. One of the things that we should do is take a look at the advantages that have accrued to us as a result of our struggles in the sixties. One of the results that occurred was that many of us were able to gain employment into the large corporations as professionals. That means we were able to:

- 1. Acquire a variety of sets of knowledge as a consequence.**
- 2. Earn salaries that enabled us to live comfortably above subsistence levels.**
- 3. Have enough spare time after a day's work to be able to give some back.**
- 4. Be able to form relationships and networks with other knowledgeable people.**

The question becomes, “How can we use these assets to benefit our communities?” Let us analyze them with regard to the development of our Telecommunications Network.

Before I proceed I would like to make this parenthetical remark:

I was on a panel discussion concerning education at a convention for the National Black United Front in San Francisco in 2001. I pointed out that during the sixties and seventies that "our movement" involved the activists, artists, business people, educators, politicians, religious persons, scholars, street folks, etc. It had everybody involved except the technical folks. And those of us with technical backgrounds who were involved were asked to stuff envelopes. Now I exaggerated to make my point. That being that our technical backgrounds were not taken advantage of the way they could and should have been. It is true that we had skills and talents that could be put to use in other areas. But that is like asking Satchel Paige to play third base just because he had a good strong arm and could throw straight.

Having people play to their strengths is one of the strategies that the Learning Center put into practice. One of the key things we did was to ask those who use mathematics in their professions (accountants, engineers, programmers, etc.) to tutor our youth in mathematics. Those who had backgrounds in the natural sciences (chemists, chemical engineers, medical professionals, physicists, etc.) were asked to tutor science. Those who had backgrounds in the humanities were asked to tutor reading. Those with backgrounds in Information Technology were asked to tutor computer related subjects. And in the area of Information Technology, it really paid off.

They had the freedom to use their best judgment as to how to proceed and to come up with innovative strategies. It was this freedom of implementing the fruits of their collective imagination that created the environment that enabled our staffers with

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backgrounds in Information Technology to come up with and implement the Telecommunications Hub ("Telehub") Network concept.

With respect to the first point: It is commonly said that when you graduate from college with a degree in Information Technology (IT) that you will still be four years behind. The cutting edge knowledge in IT is within the large corporations and big government institutions, etc. So by working there, you can gain access to that cutting edge knowledge. **If institutions are set up in our communities where our people can bring their knowledge back for our collective uplift, it can be beneficial to us all.**

Many African Americans are frustrated with the low regard many of their employers have for their skills, talents and ideas. In our community-based institutions they can be given opportunities to spread their wings and fly. It is worthy to note that this is a dynamic that is inherent in many of our churches.

The advance of most new concepts and breakthrough results come from the efforts of who can be called an esoteric few; often led by one or two persons. With regard to the Telehub, that person is Harrison May. It was primarily his

idea that we all rallied around. Initially, he and Gary Gorman worked together to get the Internet Protocol (IP) up and running. Shortly thereafter Ron Craddolph came along. Then Harrison recruited one of his IT associates from Allied Signal, Fred Gresham (whom he helped mentor), to help out. Then we were awarded the grant from Sprint, championed by Chris Thompson, which led to the establishment of the Telehub. And after our presentation to the BDPA, Aaron Brooks joined us. Later, when Harrison hired on at Hallmark, he was able to recruit one of his fellow associates in networking, John "Jay" Williams, to join the project. Also he recruited a Hallmark graphic artist, Calvin Robinson to join up. Calvin set up classes in webpage design, computer graphics and photo-shop. (This is also an example of where Number Four comes into play.)

On the second and third points: The scholars of the liberation struggles point out that, "In the early stages, you have to live off the land." This is because if you want true liberation you have to be able to initially sustain it yourself. Help will come when you demonstrate your resolve. In the later stages, however, you will have to engage the larger world community. For us "to live off the land" meant being able to sustain ourselves on what our communities can support.

It is worthy to note that whenever some territory was liberated, one of the first things that was done was to establish schools and health clinics. Our objective here was to deal with supplementing the education of our youth. It was a result of evaluating the "natural resources" available to us that led us to recognize that our churches had some space that could be used for working with our youth. And it was that evaluation that also resulted in us realizing that we had a population of people (e.g. skilled professionals) who had both knowledge and talent to share while also being financially well off enough not to require a salary. And they had spare time available to them that could be utilized for this purposes. The task at hand was to pull it all together.

The reading program initially started out using volunteers. However, when Rev. Preciphs was able to secure a grant from the United Methodist for Church Renewal, it

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started paying its tutors. On the other hand, the math program continued with volunteer tutors even after having moved its operations to Rev. Preciphs' church. It has often been pointed out that the reason we were able to obtain and continue with "volunteer" math tutors was because we were enlisting the support of co-workers and friends, especially in our early years. Consequently, the math program was constantly growing while the reading program was somewhat stagnant.

I can recall a conversation that I had with Rev. Preciphs one evening, where he asked: "Why is it that the math program is growing and the reading

program is not?" I answered: "It's because you are paying the teachers." I went on to explain more, something like this: "You can only afford to pay two teachers. And you can't get anybody to volunteer to work for free when someone else is getting paid. So you can't get any more teachers than you can afford to pay. Because the math program relies on volunteers, when the number of our students grow to the point that we need more teachers, we just go out and beat the bushes to recruit some more. Besides, we can't afford to pay the people we recruit what they are really worth anyway. And besides that, they are not doing it for the money. They are doing it because they want to give something back"

Eventually the reading section adopted this same strategy of using volunteers. After which it too began to grow. Also this approach enabled us to operate with little funds. The churches gave us space to tutor, and we voluntarily gave of our time. We now often jokingly talk about how we used to operate in our early days on a hundred dollar a year budget! However, those days have long since passed. But that set the tone for what we often refer to as the "culture of the Learning Center." Since we were all volunteering, nobody could tell anybody else what to do, or approach them like some supervisor would often do. We had to rely on a culture of persuasion. If your idea was the best or most convincing then, and only then, would it be the one that would win out. Also, your work and effort for the "cause" entitled you to have your voice heard. It was a true meritocracy where each of us rose to the levels that our respective efforts, talents and interests carried us.

As alluded to in the prelude, "The best way to organize people is around a project." Our project was to supplement the education of our youth. It was an objective profound enough for us to rally around, as well as to cause us to rise above our petty (and sometimes not so petty) differences.

It is also worthwhile to note that the mathematics program was the section of the Learning Center from which the computer section and the Telehub eventually were to spin off and evolve. (Recall that Danita Brewer, who was the original head of the computer section, was a geometry tutor. Also Keith Rainey would help out in the math section at times when we were short handed.)

The fourth point: Scientific advancement occurs these days in an environment known as "big science," where groups of scientists work together in teams. Gone are the days of Newton and Einstein where individuals work alone in their labs or studies. Although some ideas and concepts still may have their beginnings that way, to implement them

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nowadays requires "big science." Besides, only the large corporations and big government can come up with the necessary resources required to finance

these large scale operations.

The large institutions continuously send their associates to classes to update their skills and they encourage them to work together. Consequently, ideas, concepts and knowledge are shared, sometimes profusely. That kind of environment enables the people working within them to remain constantly abreast of the latest developments in their fields as well as their possible usages. By having people like this working within the Learning Center, the information that they possessed could be made readily available and could very likely lead to future ventures. There is a lot of cross-fertilization that takes place. All of this helps the Center to remain abreast of the latest advances, especially with respect to technology. It is crucial that there are persons like this who are involved with community programs who are willing to learn, stay abreast of things and to share their knowledge with the community and its institutions.

That, roughly speaking, was how the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center was established. However, with the advent of our Telecommunications Hub, we began venturing into new horizons.

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Stepping into tomorrow—got both feet on the ground. Stepping into tomorrow—my destiny is found.

This declarative chorus line gets repeated throughout the title tune of Donald Byrd's album "Stepping Into Tomorrow." It reflects the disposition that imbues the Learning Center and contributes to its culture. The IT staffers are well grounded in their understanding of the benefits that the Telehub Network can provide for our community. They are also well aware of its enabling potential...as we proceed—stepping into tomorrow.

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IT persons well grounded in their fields are the forces behind the Learning Center's Telehub Network project. They approach the project as if it was their calling. This is manifested by their dedication and work to make it successful. They clearly enjoy being able to use their knowledge, skills and talents to make this kind of contribution to our community. And in addition to this, it is rewarding for them to know just how much their efforts are really appreciated for doing so. Moreover, they know that they are taking part in an endeavor that they envision will be a tremendous asset for the benefit and uplift to their community. The growing camaraderie that continues to develop between the DLC volunteers is manifestly evident within the Telehub section. Sometimes it seems as though they operate as if they are in a state of nirvana. Perhaps their inner feelings can be captured in the words of the Ohio Players: "Heaven must be like this." However, let me hasten to add though, that they do occasionally experience times that "try men's souls."

One of our major concerns that we all rallied around in order to make a redress was the problem of lack of access to Information Technology by children in the urban core. Today there are several institutions and organizations that have established computer centers. Often times the computers they are using have been donated by some

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corporation. This means they are necessarily not using the latest versions. In addition to that, after a little time, the kids will invariably break them. **Under our strategy, our satellites will be using the "thin client" technology. This makes use of an "interface box" that enables information (data) to be transmitted between the keyboard and mouse-clicks and servers, and to be displayed on the monitor and/or sent to the printer. This means that the satellites will not have to be concerned about things like hard drives and memory—among the first things that go bad. That part of the processing, that they handle, will be done on servers at the Center, meaning there are fewer aspects of the system for the kids to break. Also the sites will have less equipment to maintain. In addition to this, the sites will not have to acquire and update software. That becomes the responsibility of the Telehub. This frees up the satellites to concentrate on what they do best, i.e. operate their programs.**

In addition to this, all of the participants will be given a username and password that will allow them to access their files from any station in any of the satellites. They will have their own "virtual system" on the network. The students who are participating in the Telehub, regardless of their parent site, will be able to do their homework on the word processor housed on the Telehub's servers at any of the sites on our network. They will also have Internet access that will enable them to do research on the World Wide Web. And so the process goes. Again, as we like to say: "We are limited to our collective imagination."

At the time the idea of the Telehub was conceived there were other approaches in operation to bring the urban core into the Information Age. Some of the churches opted to go with some of the more established organizations and methods. We were fortunate to be involved with the Swope Corridor Renaissance (SCR) neighborhood organization that had churches in it that had the confidence in us to go along with what we were proposing. (Also it probably helped that Harrison's mother, Margaret May, was the chairperson of SCR at that time and belonged to Covenant Presbyterian Church.)

It didn't take long for the word to spread about what was taking place. As mentioned earlier, Rev. Wallace Hartsfield of Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church expressed the desire to have his church participate with us when we received the grant from the Department of Education. **Also, we made a**

presentation to the Rev. Emmanuel Cleaver, who had the largest and fastest growing United Methodist Church in Kansas City's African American community. In our presentation to him and his delegation we recalled his role in the inception of the DuBois Learning Center (DLC). He readily expressed the desire for his church to participate with us. When his church became part of our network, that meant we had two of the largest churches in our community participating with our Telehub Network.

Our reputation was beginning to capture the attention of some of the civil leaders and philanthropists in the area. This was particularly true among some of those who had established processes to include the urban core in the uses of computer technology. An organization had been established that had the financial backing of major area corporations to address this need. We were encouraged by some of our corporate supporters to work with it, especially since they preferred to work through only one organization for that purpose. However, when we held discussions with them, it became

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clear to us that they were proposing that we, in effect, operate under their umbrella by having us rely on their infrastructure in order to access the Internet. **But our objective was to develop our own infrastructure so that we would not have to rely upon anyone else. We had no objections with working with other organizations, but not at the expense of giving up an essential part of our autonomy. Besides, we had a larger vision than what was being presented. They simply wanted to help set up computer centers in neighborhoods with access to the Internet. We were setting up an infrastructure that would, in effect, enable us to become an Application Service Provider (ASP), while simultaneously allowing us to stay abreast of the various advances of the technology and incorporating them whenever possible.**

Word had gotten back to us that some of the backers of that organization were asking why they were requesting so much money, while the Learning Center was accomplishing so much with so little, comparatively speaking. However, when the value of the expertise of our volunteers and the amount of time they donated to the Learning Center is taken into account, we may be talking about millions of dollars worth of in-kind contributions. Since we do not have large amounts money to donate, we have to rely on what we do have—each other. In time that organization ceased to exist, while we continued struggling along.

We had been building a reputation throughout community for our work with our youth since 1973. We knew many of the community's ministers and their church members. After all, many of our students and staff members belonged to these churches. Many of the people who were close to us knew

people and were familiar with participants in various other community organizations. Our growing reputation came about, in part, as a result that familiarity.

Meanwhile, the word of the Telehub Network project that was taking place at the Center was beginning to get out into the community, especially among the churches. We had tutored a lot of children of churches in our community over the years, and I would like to think that many of the church members took pride in our achievements and appreciated our efforts. So with the advent of the Telehub Network, many of them were supportive and wanted to participate. Several churches were approaching us about getting connected to the Telehub. **At the time of this writing, we had over twenty churches and organizations wanting to participate. The only thing holding us back was funding.**

I remember once talking with Harrison, when the Telehub was in its embryonic stage, about the need for resources to accomplish some of our objectives. I can recall him saying that he was not worried about it. He said, "I noticed that ever since I've been up here, whenever we really needed something, something always seems to have come through." I have since dubbed that "Harrison's Hypothesis." Now his hypothesis would get an acid test. There were three major areas that were pressing us to obtain more resources:

- 1. the additional expenses for utilities required by the Telehub,**
- 2. the continuous necessary upgrading of hardware and software,**
- 3. the desire to bring more sites onto the network.**

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With respect to the first two, Harrison's Hypothesis seemed to be holding up. The third one, however, was testing our faith.

General Electric (thanks, at least in part, to efforts of Phil Cole again) awarded us a grant of \$150,000 to upgrade our equipment. That now made them our largest overall corporate contributor to date. (Which was Phil's often stated goal.)

However, there were other forms of donations made to the Learning Center. The corporations, where some of us worked, contributed various forms of hardware whenever they made upgrades. General Electric donated several printers that we shared with our satellites. **When Harrison worked for Health Midwest, they donated several 17-inch monitors, copiers much better than the ones we had, and other forms of hardware. They were a non-for-profit organization at the time that later was bought out by a for-profit organization. Their IT division was going to**

be taken over by the IT division of the new organization, so they made a substantial donation to us of a variety of hardware and other IT equipment that they were going to either upgrade or salvage. Also, Sprint had donated some servers to us when they made an upgrade.

I mentioned earlier about equipment that was not the latest versions. However, for the stage we were in, the hardware donated to us enabled us to make a tremendous improvement of our system. And again, we were venturing into territory that no other community based organization that we knew of was venturing into. So a lot of the equipment donated to us was on a level that most community based organizations could not even use.

I have discussed how the Learning Center was essentially self-reliant in its initial stages. But now we were moving into a stage whereby we had to engage the larger community if we were to accomplish the objectives we were envisioning. We also found that when you demonstrate results and show resolve, there will be those in the larger community that will extend to you a helping hand. This is because they realize that in the long run, it will benefit them also. As is often stated, it is in everyone's interest for the urban core to improve academically. And it is important to have an educated workforce in the community in order to attract industry and businesses. So it is more than simply a humanitarian effort (although that too was surely part of their willingness to help us).

As we began to acquire more and more hardware and equipment, it became necessary for us to manage our storage area. Initially Franklyn Williams (one of my cousins and a student in the DLC during its first years of operation) took on that responsibility. He cleared out our basement area, and organized and arranged the equipment stored there. Meanwhile, George Walker had begun talking with another of his fellow associates at SBC, G. B. Gray, a communications technician, about what was going on at the Center. G. B. became involved and interested in working with the storage area and the management of our hardware inventory. When Carmen Witherspoon took on the responsibility of coordinating the equipment for the wiring projects, she too got involved with that phase of the process, but with emphasis on making sure that the wiring projects had the equipment and supplies they needed for their jobs in a timely fashion.

As the word of Telehub Network began to spread through the community, we were often called upon to explain to people and various organizations its concept and the benefits it held for our community. In turn they would ask about various possibilities and

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offer suggestions. Typical among them were inquires about software that could be loaded on the servers that they were interested in using. Of course we conveyed to them that as long as it was network compatible it could be done. The Swope Parkway Church of Christ had us load a version of the Bible

on the server. **Lisa Cole, of Metropolitan Missionary AME Zion, asked about installing some software that would enable her to teach a course on filling income taxes online, which we were able to acquire and do. We received and installed some software so that a class could be offered on banking and investing in the stock market. And so on and so on. Again, as we often say, we are limited to our collective imagination.**

In addition to this, as previously stated, we began to offer a series of computer related classes: the windows operating system, the Microsoft office suite, webpage design, computer graphics, computer maintenance, etc. After observing the growth of the Telehub Network, Harrison became interested in us becoming able to offer courses that could lead to Cisco certification. (Cisco Systems is a company that supplies the routers which enable the network to transfer data between the various computers, servers and work stations via the Internet. The demand for personnel that could administer their system was so great that they could not wait for the colleges and schools to train them. So they sought to set up or certify their own training operations which they referred to as Cisco Academies.)

Harrison May was able to become Cisco certified when the company he worked for, Hallmark Cards, sent him for the training. And after some negotiations with Cisco Systems, the Learning Center was designated as a Cisco Academy. So after the Center procured and set up the equipment necessary for the classes, Harrison set up a schedule for people to receive the training to become Cisco certified. A little later, Hallmark sent Jay Williams to receive the Cisco training and now we had two persons trained to offer Cisco courses.

Our primary goal was to work with middle and senior high school students. Ron Craddolph taught an introductory class so that students could develop the technological background that would enable them to step up to the Cisco classes. But we also held classes for adults wishing to further their education in Information Technology. And this would prove to be an additional benefit to our Telehub Network. As they acquired the knowledge, Harrison, Jay and Aaron would give them assignments to help administer the Network. This provided more hands to help with the network maintenance.

Ed Howard, one of the adults who signed up to take the Cisco course, delved right into it. He soon became one of the students that Harrison relied upon to assist with the system and network maintenance. Ed, who hails from Guam, offered to become a part of the DLC's computer staff. Part of his work with us had him constantly running to the basement seeking out spare parts to replace computer and other equipment. Consequently, he soon developed a good working relationship with G.B. Not long after that, Ed and G.B. became the main managers of the hardware storage area. (After a while, Ed's work ethic along with the knowledge he was able to acquire within the Cisco

classes and his work with our system and network enabled him to land a job with the US Department of Agriculture's IT Section.)

Another one of the adults who took the Cisco class was Xiaomei Yao. She had earned her PhD in computer Science from a school in mainland China and was a volunteer in our computer section. She works for the dental school at the University of

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Missouri at Kansas City, and her husband, Xiaoyu Tan, is a researcher in the medical school there. She saw an opportunity to expand her knowledge and signed up for the course. She soon became active in using that knowledge to help our administration staff, among others, with their usage of the computer applications on our network.

Clearly the Learning Center was reaping huge benefits from its Cisco Academy. But what about the Cisco Academy itself? Its growth was putting more and more demands on its staff. It required laboratory as well as lecture work. Fortunately for us, Marcus Johnson-El, who was a member of Swope Parkway Church of Christ, became interested in taking advantage of the opportunity to sign up for the Cisco Academy. His demonstrated interest in the lab work involved in the academy eventually paid off for us. While going through the program he would regularly help his fellow students with this part of their training. And having gone through the academy, this manifested interest of his led him to eventually be over the laboratory aspect of our Cisco Academy.

We also began to develop relationships with area institutions of higher learning that had programs in Information Technology. Sanford Brown College (now Colorado Technical University) formed an arrangement with us where their IT students do their internship at the Learning Center. Therein they would help out with the system administration and other various projects. Also, Devry Institute would have some of their students do class projects at the Learning Center. This provided us with extra hands and help with the system administration as well as support for the Telehub Network.

General Electric has a program where their associates select a community-based organization for them to volunteer on Saturdays to upgrade their facility's building and/or grounds. Thanks again to Phil Cole, they selected us for one of their projects. We were very fortunate to have them as they landscaped our grounds, gave some of our classrooms a fresh paint job and even retiled our main stairway. That really spruced thing up for us!

Most of the support we receive from the white community tends to come by way of the corporations, government or philanthropic organizations. However, there are a few exceptions. Ron Bowers e-mailed us from our website (<http://www.duboislc.org/>) expressing

that he liked what he saw and that he would like to work with us. We replied to him inviting him to the Center. He came one Saturday and talked with us. When we realized his proficiency with data bases, we immediately asked him to work with our computer and administration staffs. He began working with the computer section in general, and with Terri Moore on the administrative side in particular, to set up databases for both the students and the staff. By the way, Jerry McEvoy, mentioned earlier, of the Swope Corridor Renaissance (SCR) and St. Louis Catholic Church, whose support has been invaluable, is another one.

The year of 2001 saw the beginning of an exciting new program that was spearheaded by SCR under the leadership and guidance of Margaret May and Jerry McEvoy. The four churches of the Corridor and the DLC came together to conduct an eight week educational and recreational summer program for our youth.

The program was set up such that the Upper Room at St. Louis Catholic Church had the students going to the first and second grades, the Swope Parkway United Christian Church had the third grades, Covenant Presbyterian had the fourth, Swope Parkway Church of Christ had the fifth and sixth, and the Learning Center had the seventh and eight. All of these locations were a part of the Telehub Network, and this

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was the first time that we all came together to work on an encompassing project of this magnitude. McEvoy oversaw the proposal writing that enabled us to secure the resources so that this program could continue year after year. The following year the churches in the "Linwood Cluster" would join in the program that we now named the "Urban Campus." What this program really did was to demonstrate to our community just what was possible with the concept of the Telehub Network. In scientific terminology, we had now reached critical mass. We had begun "stepping into tomorrow."

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Chapter Four: Steppin' Out

Freedom, Inc. is a political organization in Kansas City that sprung up from the grassroots and has had a tremendous impact on the Greater Kansas City Metropolitan Area. I have often stated the Freedom Inc. should be studied. One telling observation is that it was founded by independent Black business people: Leon Jordan, board chairman, owned a bar; Bruce Watkins, president, was head of his family owned funeral home; Howard Maupin, treasurer, owned a barbershop; Fred Curls owned a real estate agency; Leonard Hughes, who named the organization, had a law firm; Harold Holliday, Sr., who later became

the board chairman, after the assassination of Leon Jordan, also owned a law firm; Rosemary Lowe was a beautician. That put them in a position to operate in what they perceived to be the community's best interest without fear of retribution with regard to their livelihood.

A generation later, after the founding of Freedom Inc., the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center was founded. And somewhat similarly, it too was founded by individuals who were either independently employed or who were professionals earning a salary comfortably above subsistence pay. Likewise, we too were able to engage in our "community/activist" activity without having to consider constricting strings being attached. It was pointed out in the earlier chapters just how Freedom Inc, played a significant role in us being in the position to accomplish many of the things we are able to do today. Being able to provide a technological infrastructure of the "Urban Campus" was one of them.

However, with growth there come situations that cry out to be dealt with. The load demands placed on the network required us to update our hardware and software. We were able to get some help from area corporations, in particular GE and Microsoft, in that regard. But the computer uses of the summer program put a lot of demands on our staff to support their activities as well. At first we only had one person, Elton Gumbel, to handle that support. But the demands on him were getting to be too great. Fortunately for us, the Kauffman Foundation made resources available for us to get Elton some help. Fortunately for us also, was the fact the Kelvin C. "KC" Simmons had taken the courses in Cisco certification offered by the Center and was available to come and work with us.

KC had been attending a class offered by the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization (ASCAC) that was held in the Learning Center. While there, Bill Grace had been talking to him about the Telehub Network and it had sparked his interest. When he found out about the classes offered in Cisco, he asked if he could sign up. As they say, the rest is history. For KC showed great interest and promise in mastering the subject matter and when the other network support position opened up, it was offered to him. He accepted it even though it was part-time. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the rate at which we were growing, it wouldn't be too long before it got upgraded to full time.

In the meantime, some other significant things were happening in the rest of the Learning Center. Tracy Warren had enrolled her two sons in the Center's math, reading and science programs. During the orientation she became aware of our need for more volunteers in our administration staff and offered to help. When Von Elston and Terri Moore found out that she was a vice principal at De LaSalle High School here in Kansas

City, they immediately sought out her knowledge and expertise. When Ron Bowers offered to help us develop our data bases, Terri and Tracy were the main ones to participate in that effort. When all of this is taken into consideration it seems as though Harrison's Hypothesis was operating for us in more than just financial concerns. A synthesizing and cross-fertilizing within the Learning Center was taking place that foreshadowed exciting things to come.

As the Telehub Network began to come together, several things began to happen. Among them, as stated before, were inquiries that we were getting more and more of about participation. Another was both inquiries and observations as to the various ways it could be used. All of these things generated an impetus for us to reach out and expand our horizons.

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"Steppin' Out" is the opening song on the Steel Pulse album, "Earth Crisis." Ronald "Stepper" McQueen, the bass player, lays down rhythmic, pulsating lines throughout the tune. Its opening lines exude self-confidence:

Steppin' out (Repeated four times.)

Open says a me, Here comes Rasta man. Abracadabra, Catch me if you can.

Notice that he does not say "sesame," the word used (symbolic of how the sesame seed bud opens up) in the Tales of the Arabian Knights story that permits whoever says "Open sesame" entry into a secret cavern. He says, "Open SAYS A ME," in other words, because HE says so, as if to imply that he wants "out" of a situation that he's contained "in," or that he just refuses to be held back.

He's a self-confident RASTA man who knows himself (as DuBois alludes to in the quote in the "Prelude") that's declaring he is "stepping out." Then defiantly says "Abracadabra" (a word used by magicians before a magic feat), "Catch me if you can."

So it is with the DLC's Telehub visionaries. They too are self confident as to what can be achieved with their understanding of the wonders of telecommunications technology, and how it can be used to benefit our community. They have insight into what may seem like magic to others, as they confidently go about implementing their vision.

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In the very process of becoming a part of the DLC's Telehub Network one begins to acquire an understanding of what the Learning Center is all about, especially for those not fully aware of what we do. One such case was when the Non-Denominational Greater Corinthian Church of Christ became a participant. When their representatives became aware that we tutored kids, and had an established track record in doing so, they expressed a desire to have a tutoring program in their church as well. So we, in keeping

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with our desire to help uplift our community, worked with them to help them establish their reading program.

However, where we really began "steppin' out" was when we were able to establish a satellite in Detroit, Michigan. One of the things I had been doing as the technology coordinator for NBUF was keeping them abreast of what was happening at the DLC with our Telehub Network. Although they would all politely listen to me, I could tell that many of them at that time did not really understand everything I was talking about. When an NBUF central committee meeting was to be held in Kansas City in 2002, I saw an opportunity too good to pass up. I knew that members of our Detroit chapter were involved with institutions that worked with youth and, significantly, had their own buildings. So I called them and suggested that they bring some technical people to the CC meeting, whether they were actually members of NBUF or not. Fred Reeder and Marvis Cofield of Alkebulan Village were some of those who came.

I made a presentation at the meeting, but it was in the social gathering after the official meetings were over that some serious dialogue about the Telehub Network took place. After some discussion on how the Telehub was working here in Kansas City, the talks turned to how to bring Alkebulan (ancient Egyptian for "land of the Blacks") Village on board. I went on to explain that just as we were spreading the Telehub throughout Kansas City, that they could do the same thing in Detroit.

It turned out that Fred had checked out our computer labs during the lunch break of the CC. There he just happened to meet and started talking with George Walker about Alkebulan Village getting hooked up with us. When George found out that their computer lab had a DSL connection, he told Fred that all they needed to be up and running was a Virtual Private Network (VPN) box. To be honest about it, at that time I didn't even know what a VPN box was, and I'm sure that Fred didn't either. But there was George running it down.

Fred and his Detroit delegation expressed the desire to not only become a part of the Network but to be the venue through which it spreads throughout Detroit. Now it was just a matter of getting the

ball rolling. The process of getting them hooked up, however, became a trying experience.

After we obtained a VPN box, got it configured, and sent it to them, we discovered that they did not have anyone available to them in Detroit who could finish hooking it up to their system. Fred offered to pay someone to hook it up for them. I then asked him, "How much would it cost?" I told him, "If it cost more than a plane ticket, we could send one of our guys up there." Between Alkebulan Village and the Learning Center, we were able to make arrangements for George Walker and Jay Williams to go up there and get the job done. The feature that attracted them the most was the ability to access software that enabled them to test and track their student's reading levels. And now, as a result of their success, we could entertain the concept of going national!

Since then we have held discussions with interested parties in several other cities. However, the city that took us up on getting involved was Chicago. Toriano Granger is the national secretary for NBUF and he is also a mechanical engineer. He took up the challenge to spearhead the task of getting NBUF's national headquarters hooked up to the Telehub Network. He was fortunate to have Vincent Johnson, an NBUF member in Chicago who works in IT to help him in the process.

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In the process of developing something like the Telehub Network, there are often collateral benefits, as well as opportunities and possibilities that occur and can be taken advantage of. **I have always thought of the DLC as being somewhat parallel to a university. In addition to academic pursuits, research is done and skills are learned that can lead to the establishment or spin off of entrepreneurial ventures. One such opportunity occurred when the owner, Jack Bey, of the company we worked with that set up and installed the equipment (including antennas and dishes) for the wireless connections, said to me that he was thinking about retiring and that his kids were not interested in continuing on with his business. That meant that we would have to find some other company or person to handle that aspect of the work needed in order for us to continue to expand the Telehub Network.**

I immediately thought of Ajamu Webster, the same staff member who led the survey that enabled us to acquire our property and led to all of this. He now owned his own civil and structural engineering firm, DuBOIS Consultants, Inc. And his firm was the one that we had relied on to coordinate the erection of the tower (the "Beacon of Hope") that enabled the Telehub Network to obtain a wider reach. Webster held talks with Jack Bey and also did some research on the future possibilities of wireless telecommunications. Realizing the opportunities in this emerging field, he set up a new branch of his

firm, which was called "DuBOIS Wireless." Francis "Frank" Herndon, Jr. and Michael "Mike" Russell took on the business and technical responsibilities, respectively, of getting things up and running.

Before long we felt as though it would be good if we held some brain storming sessions to get a handle on where we were and the direction in which we should head. Webster, Herndon and Russell of DuBOIS Wireless, and George Walker, Harrison May and I from the DLC's Telehub Network met regularly on Tuesday evenings. Gloria Fondren, who had a grant writing business, was invited to participate and help facilitate the sessions. And Leah Russell, our CFO, occasionally attended also.

We discussed in more detail our objectives of working with non-profit community organizations, including churches and neighborhood organizations, the concept of working with small businesses, and individual homes. We went over the possibilities of conducting training sessions for businesses. The more we brain-stormed the more we realized the need to expand our facilities (Harrison had been telling us that we needed a larger building) to accommodate the rate at which we were evolving. What we were becoming aware of was the fact that even though we had the capabilities (i.e. skills and talent) to accomplish our dreams and visions, what was holding us back was our lack of resources. Nevertheless, we still proceeded to put together some plans for a new building. Again we relied on the expertise of Ajamu Webster and Henry Glass (a mechanical engineer who works in the construction industry and tutors geometry in our math program) to guide us through the process. Things were moving right along. Various opportunities and possibilities were opening up for us. We were involved in several activities and were operating on several fronts.

As a consequence we began receiving suggestion from our supporters that we should establish an advisory board. It was in 2003 that we turned to Phil Cole to spearhead this task. We approached the various corporations that had been supporting us to send representatives to be on our advisory board. We also approached area businesses,

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community organizations, politicians, etc. that had been supportive of us to participate. The advisory board usually meets on a quarterly basis. They have been helpful in sharing information that has been quite useful. Several of the political representatives have shared with us information about programs designed to help out with education that we are in a position to take advantage of. The representatives from the corporations shared with us how we could take advantage of and apply for recourses that they had set up to do similar things. The discussions and interchange that take place has enabled us to develop innovative strategies in our efforts to move forward, and to take advantage of opportunities that are available that we sometimes

would not be privy to. In addition to that, the cross-fertilization and networking that has taken place has enabled us to expand our visions in way we may not have otherwise.

An example of this may stem from some of the discussions we are holding about partnering with some of the area corporations to set up computer centers in rural areas; or to become a facility to train their associates in updating their skills. With regard to this last concept, many corporations realize the necessity of there being community based training facilities to help prepare the local workforce to update their knowledge and skills because of the continuing advance of the technology. Several of them have become aware of the capabilities of the Learning Center's Telehub Network as a result of these meetings. And we began receiving invitations to discuss the possibility of us participating with them in this capacity.

There are other benefits and relationships that developed as a result of both our relationship with area corporations, and having members and supporters of the DLC who were associates therein. The emergence of the Black Family Technology Awareness Association (BFTAA) was a case in point. As indicated by the name, this organization's mission is to address the technological awareness of African Americans by focusing primarily on families. It was organized by Tyrone Taborn of Baltimore to put on programs that promoted the concept and is strongly supported by IBM and Verizon. An SBC executive became aware of it and thought it was a good concept to get involved with. He called it to the attention of effervescent George Walker. He was encouraged to organize some interested people, including some of his SBC associates of their Community Network and members of the DLC's Telehub Network, to kick off their initial activity. During the month of February (traditionally, Black History Month) the group, which held it meetings at the Learning Center, decided to conduct a week of activities that highlighted the role and benefits of technology in the everyday lives of people. Each day had a different location and theme, including education, health, youth, and a recognition program for area persons that had made a contribution in the field of technology.

One of the persons so acknowledged was Harrison May for his vision and work in the establishment of the Learning Center's Telehub Network (and by-the-way, yours truly for my work in helping to found the Learning Center and my work in the mathematics program that ultimately led to the establishment of the Computer Department and the Telehub Network).

As a result of the success of this activity, the interest it generated, and the need that was being addressed, the group decided to proceed to establish and organization so that it could carry on this mission. Among the other groups that were enlisted to join in

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were Sprint's Diamond Network, the Black Data Processors Association

(BDPA) and other persons that shared the mission's objectives.

Back to the event: it was our good fortune to be introduced to Craig Nulan who shared a spot with me on a panel discussion on how the technology can be used to benefit our community. Craig, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) computer science graduate, was impressed enough by what he heard about the activities that were going on at the DLC that he wanted to get involved with us. His coming happened at an opportune time. For what had been happening at the Center was the initial steps to establish an Internet based radio station. And Craig had an interest in working with pod-casting. Now while all of this was going on, Marcus Brown, who works with media education at Genesis school, was usually video taping many of our programs, along with his students. Also Ken Mosley, an electrical engineering graduate from the University of Missouri School of Mines at Rolla, had now taken over the technology responsibility of DuBOIS Wireless. He too was participating with BFTAA, and had become a volunteer at the DLC who was also interested in working with the radio project. Clearly one of the collateral benefits of the BFTAA to the Learning Center was its association with "fellow travelers" and its developing network of technology savvy persons.

The radio project had been conceived as a result of a conversation I had with Keidi Obi Awadu of LIB Radio (Living In Black, www.libradio.net). He had seen our website and gave me a call. (We made arrangements for me to have a discussion about W.E.B. DuBois in general, the Learning Center and our Telehub Network on his show.) While engaged in the telephone discussion we talked about the concept of establishing networks throughout the country whereby his feed could be rebroadcast in local areas. When I brought this concept to the DLC group, they became interested. However, it was in an NBUF meeting where discussions were held concerning the acculturation of our youth that I mentioned the talks the DLC was having regarding the Internet radio that the concept took root and began to grow. Attending that meeting was Sharon Jackson, who worked closely with the PTA at the J.S. Chick elementary African Centered School. She took the initiative to organize the project. George Walker and I were participants in the effort with her, although our role was primarily with the technology infrastructure.

Unfortunately, due to family illness with Sharon, and the energy the BFTAA project required of George and me, the radio project became stalled. Fortunately, however, Trent Bell took up the mantle. Trent is an electrician who is both a long time Learning Center and NBUF member. He reactivated the meetings and this time we had even more people interested in participating. Among them were NBUF members Diallo Jefferson, Julian Love and Claude Hawkins, and also Osco Bolton, a former gang member who now mentors young people. Now we had a good working team that welcomed Craig and his talents with open arms.

But there is more: Lani Charles and Veronica McDaniel are members of BFTAA who joined the Learning Center's reading staff. Lani was a former student in our science program when she was in high school. She majored in journalism and works for SBC. She fondly remembered her experiences while at the Learning Center and wanted to give back. Veronica was a former elementary school teacher who also worked for SBC and saw this as an opportunity to work again with our youth. It is noteworthy to point out that while attending BFTAA meetings at the Learning Center, they had on occasions engaged in dialogue with Elton Gumbel about our reading program. As a consequence,

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they saw where their participation not only would be appreciated but simultaneously would satisfy their desire to work with our youth. Needless to say that Linda Watkins, the director of our reading program, was thrilled to have them join us and so too was the rest of the staff, especially Elton.

All in all, BFTAA has been a boon to the DLC in many ways. It has developed a tremendous network that we have been able to pipe into. As it puts on programs, it also helps inform members of the community about the happenings at the DLC. It therefore provides somewhat of a marketing function for us. In addition, several of its members help us out in other capacities. Sherry Lumpkins, who has a web-page designing business, has offered to help Calvin Robinson with our web page maintenance and classes. Tracy Brunston helped facilitate a workshop when we held a retreat. Claresta Lewis (whom I consider an expeditor supreme) regularly cooperates with us to get things done. Theresa Adair has offered to help students prepare for their ACT and SAT examinations, and to help maintain our "Black College" web site. And there are many other examples far too numerous to include here.

We are beginning to receive many inquires from corporations, individuals, entrepreneurs and others as to how they can work with us or form a relationships. Russell Bronston, a member of BFTAA who works in IT and has a web-page hosting business, witnessed such an occasion and suggested that we should set up a committee to evaluate such proposals—and to determine the feasibility and what it would take to work things out. He is also acquainted with Leah Russell, our CFO, so, as of this writing, they have been charged with following through with working up his suggestion. So clearly, as people see the advantage of working with the infrastructure set up by the Telehub Network, these inquiries will continue to come our way. And our Telehub Network will continue to evolve. As we like to say: "We are limited to our collective imagination." And our collective imagination is propelling us forward—it's the motive force that keeps us "Steppin' Out."

Interlude: Congo Square

It has always been difficult for us to explain the "culture" of the W.E.B. DuBois

Learning Center. Many people who have visited us often say that, try as we may, talking and writing about it does not capture its essence, let alone the value of what is really taking place. You really have to come and see it to gain an appreciation for what is going on. In order to try to explain the culture of the Learning Center I will liberally make use of allegory and analogy in the remainder of this memoir.

In this Interlude I will briefly try and relay an intuitive feel for the essence of the Learning Center and its' Telehub Network. And in the remaining sections I will discuss in a little more detail about of their basic impact, their intrinsic value and their looming possibilities.

Let us begin by considering the sociological images portrayed in the following discourse.

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The Neville Brothers have a CD, "Live On Planet Earth", which contains the song "Congo Square" written by Sonny Landreth. It is about that area of New Orleans where African Americans back in the day were free to gather and play music of their own liking, their own style, in whichever manner they chose to play. It is from there that the art form of jazz was created. Their rendition is laced with percussive rhythms in the background and punctuated with searing saxophone rifts. Its lyrics are as follows:

Well it might be superstitious But some kind of something is going on down there. (Repeated)

Well it's an old time tradition

When they play them drums at night in Congo Square. You can hear them in the distance— Old folks in the bayou say your prayers. (Repeated)

That's when them voodoo people gather

And play them drums at night in Congo Square. Well my eyes would not believe it But what I seen that night I could not turn away. (Repeated)

They had that mojo in motion I seen them dancing and prancing with

that sway.

The more I listened to this song, the more I thought of it as a metaphor of people experiencing the culture of the Learning Center.

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The musicians of the "Classic" Congo Square drew from the spirit of their "old time tradition" to express what was in their beleaguered souls and brought forth a new

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music that was a wonder to behold. A century later, there were those of us who were concerned about the acculturation and education of our youth. So like those Congo Square musicians, we too were inspired to come together and generate musings that led to the birth of a new concept. For me, the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, together with its Telehub Network, is likened unto a "Contemporary" Congo Square.

Back then, the life that Africa's descendants here in America had to live was stressful to say the least. It was lived with a kind of resignation. And sometimes just to get some relief they would gather unto themselves so that they could relax in their own way and enjoy doing things in ways that felt good to them. Music was a healing balm. But it had to be applied in their own way in order to soothe their weary souls. The musical instruments and styles Africa's descendants found here in America were unlike those from whence they came. But once here, they learned to adjust and use what they had available to them, and apply their own styles and techniques drawing from their own cultural patterns and traditions. And in so doing they improvised and created a new art form. This dynamic unfolded in many aspects of their lives in their struggles to both survive and thrive here. And that is just as true today as it was then.

With the emergence of the Information Age, Africa's descendants of today are doing much of the same. New technologies give rise to new infrastructures that can be developed and taken advantage of in the acculturation of today's youth. And like the participants of Congo Square of old used what they had to address their needs, we have a similar challenge confronting us today. The Learning Center's Telehub Network is an example of using today's technology, drawing upon cultural patterns and traditions inherent in our urban cores, to develop such an infrastructure. How this unfolded was described in the previous chapters.

When I reflect on the first verse, it appears to me to deal more with the senses: "it might be superstitious." They just felt that "some kind of something is going on down there." Similarly, in the early years of the Learning Center, people would tell us that they felt that some kind of

something is going on over here.

But like back in the day when Africa's descendants gathered to address the needs of their weary souls by playing drums in Congo Square at night, we in this day gather to address the needs of our children's weary academic souls by displaying academic insight in the Learning Center on Saturday mornings and evenings. And over time, people in our community have begun to feel that something was going on "over there." However, as the song says, it was in keeping with "an old time tradition" to come together to acquire and receive that healing balm that may be difficult, if not impossible, to attain otherwise.

The second verse indicates that it is more obvious what is going on in Congo Square because you can "hear them in a distance." And "old folks in the Bayou" were even advised to "say your prayers." Likewise, as the Learning Center had been operating for awhile, people became more aware of what we were doing, primarily by word of mouth. And some folks have even told us that what we were doing was an answer to their prayers.

Where the song says "voodoo people gather," for me that can be thought of as saying people of like minds and spirits, or people who are culturally and traditionally

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attuned to each other, come together. But in this case the "voodoo people" are Africa's descendants. The implication here is the continuing influence of their African culture.

Voodoo is regarded by most people as simply something like a cult or witchcraft, something magical and/or something highly superstitious. But those who have seriously studied it, like anthropologists, realize that it is much more complicated than that. They have a better understanding of it, and as a consequence, have a different appreciation of it. They understand that it is actually a secret society that you have to be initiated into. It has practices that pertain to the healing arts, herbal medicines and psychological nuances that stem from ancient African traditions. (By-the-way, both author Zora Neal Hurston and dancer Katherine Dunham studied anthropology and were initiated into it. And the documentations they made of some of their findings and insights verify these observations.)

Similarly, when jazz first came about, it was not looked upon in high regard by those who were not in tune with the culture that produced it. For those who were, its' rhythms continued to resonate, and to address their heartfelt needs. (And lest we forget: Back in the seventies a lot of us were listening "In a Silent Way," and some still do, as "Miles Runs the Voodoo Down.") As for others, the more it was gotten into and understood, the more their appreciation of it grew. By comparison, when one simply hears or reads

about the Learning Center, one's usual impression is that it is an admirable but simplistic approach to address an age old heartfelt concern—the desire to work with our youth. But inevitably, those who come and see it in operation, to witness it first hand, realize that there is much more depth to what is happening there than whatever one's original impression may have been. There is a cultural interaction impacting the acculturation, as well as the education, of our youth that one does not appreciate or grasp otherwise.

In both cases, Congo Square and the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, an aspect of cultural needs were met. People would tell tales of the uplifting of spirits they had received from their participation in Congo Square. Similar comments have been made by parents who brought their children to the DuBois Learning Center. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, the Kansas City, Missouri School District commissioned a California organization to conduct a survey of their parents whose children attended the DLC in order to ascertain their opinion as to how beneficial the Learning Center was to their children. And over 90% of the responses were in the top two categories—excellent or good.

That brings us to the third and final verse. This is where it becomes clearer just what is going on, or just what is taking place, in Congo Square. And even when witnessing it, one is still amazed: "my eyes could not believe it." But the fascination is apparently spellbinding: "what I seen that night I could not turn away."

This verse is reminiscent of comments we hear regularly regarding people's impression, as alluded to above, when they visit the Learning Center for the first time. I became aware of this in the mid seventies when Morris Brown, a co-worker at Allied Signal, brought it to my attention. The late Ron Jones was an electrical engineer who tutored advanced mathematics with me and was also a co-worker of ours. Ron and I had been telling Brown about the DLC for months, and we regularly invited him to visit us.

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Finally one Saturday he took us up on it. The next Monday I asked him what he thought. He put his pen down on his desk, spun his chair around, and looked me dead in the eye and told me something like: "Dick, y'all been telling me about the Center for months. But you can't tell anybody about it. You have to go and see it."

We have had similar experiences ever since. I can recall Bill Grace trying to explain the concept of the Learning Center during a long distance conversation. And I remember Leah Russell, our CFO, saying to him: "Bill, you can't explain it to anyone. No matter what you say, they just won't understand it."

Long story short: You have to see “that mojo in motion,” you have to actually see the “dancing and prancing with that sway” to comprehend what is really “going on down there.”

For me, in analyzing this song, the analogy between Congo Square and the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center is both nuanced and striking. But at the heart of it all is the reality of how creative a people can be in addressing their needs when they are free to be, and choose to be, true to themselves.

With that in mind, I shall conclude this Interlude with the words in the title of one of Nina Simone’s most significant albums: “Nuff Said.”

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Chapter Five: Observations

Of Where We’ve Come From and What We Have Done —“We’ve Come This Far By Faith”—

There is an old African saying that “all things move in a circle.” This very same

sentiment is expressed most commonly these days as “history repeats itself.” In the African American community, it is typically enunciated as “what goes around comes around.” As we observe history, I suggest that although it may seem to repeat itself, it does not come back around full circle. Rather it is more like a helix. It may very well come back around all right, but on another level.

Let us consider education. The education of our youth takes on the form of the manner in which families usually earn their living. In the Agricultural Age, families typically had a large number of children to help out with the farm work. Women usually stayed at home doing chores. Children were educated within this framework, and given time off from school to help out with the harvesting of crops. And the schools were setup to accommodate all of this, which is why they were dismissed during the summer months.

With the onset of the Industrial Age, the families earned their living working in factories. And families moved to the cities in order to do it. The work hours were at a set schedule, commonly expressed as set from nine to five. The number of children per family became smaller in that large numbers were no longer needed. For the most part, the women’s responsibilities were still tied to the home. The schools now took on the characteristic of the factory, and set regularly scheduled hours, usually from around eight to three, however, the summer recesses were continued. Both the factory jobs and the schools started and ended with “the ring of a bell.” At the schools, children were acculturated to be able to adjust to the factory, and later the corporate, work environment.

Now we are entering into a new age—The Information Age. The structure of education may still mirror the work place, but like a helix it will be on another level as it adjusts to accommodate the requirements of the Industrial Age. As the styles and forms of work change to make the necessary adjustments, so too will the styles and forms of schooling. The W.E.B DuBois Learning Center was established to supplement the education of our youth in the style and form of the Industrial Age. I submit that the Telehub Network is a style and form needed to supplement education for the Information Age.

In these times, due especially to the advent of technology, more and more people are working at home. And if the “historical helix” is in play, more and more education will take place in the home. Already we see the technology being utilized in homes in a variety of ways, including:

5. · students doing research on the Internet,
6. · schools communicating with parents and students via e-mail,
7. · assignments being posted on school and/or teacher websites,
and
8. · all sorts of school information being made available via
websites.

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Distance learning is going on with college, and even some high school, courses being offered via the Internet. A growing variety of certifications are being obtained over the Internet, and in more and more instances, college degrees are being offered that way too. Surely the high schools cannot be too far behind.

All-of-this points to the growing need for access to the technology. There is a growing concern over the residents of America’s urban cores being left behind. This is especially crucial for our youth. Let me reiterate a point made in Chapter Two:

When students in about the fourth grade or higher are asked to do homework, it is expected that it be done on a word processor. However, many of the students in the urban core do not have access to the technology. Although they can avail themselves of computers in public libraries, most cities have very few in their urban cores. (Here in Kansas City there are only two.) However, I would hazard to guess that there are churches and community centers on “every other corner.” So we reasoned that if we strategically locate computer centers in them, it may be possible that perhaps over half of the students could have access within walking distance.

This served as the primary driving force for our technical staffers to conceive of and develop our Telehub Network. It is another example of our people

using their creativity to address our needs. All praises to those who worked, and continue to work, to make this dream a reality. They, and the other volunteers of the DLC, truly are a special breed of character.

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Elton Gumbel is one of Kansas City's most conscientious artists and lyricist. He and bassist Keith Leathers put out an album in 1982 entitled "Observations." On it there is a song, "High On A Hill," that contains the following lines:

High on a hill overlooking all oppression I can see it all, my vision's clear. But I wasn't made to overlook nothing I was made to make the changes I can see I need.

I wasn't made to overlook nothing Get off of the mountain and back to the valley. (Chorus)

In times like these, it's hard to resist the temptation To pack up all my things and leave the scene. But that wouldn't change none of the problems I believe in Running away won't bring the way things ought to be

(Chorus)

High on a hill I can escape all of my troubles But I still can't escape from me you see.

(Chorus)

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These words reflect the expression of many of the grassroots movement activists and theorists that "You can't lead people from the mountain top, you have to come to the valley where the people are."

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Kenneth Clark was one of the historians whose work was influential in the outcome of the historical Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education U.S Supreme Court decision. In his book Dark Ghetto he pointed out (I paraphrase): "To read about a starving child is one thing—you may be moved to just talk about it. But to actually see a starving child is another thing—you will be moved to act."

When we saw the plight of our inner city youth, we were moved to act. Or as Elton put it, we had to "get off of the mountain and back to the valley." And once there, you will receive a reality check. For the reality in the valley will sorely test the theories and philosophies of those who reside on the mountain top.

There is an old saying that "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." Gen. Colin Powell, while serving as Chief of Staff of the U.S. armed forces, expressed this thought as "plans are good up to the point of execution." I'm sure you get the point. And our experience with the Telehub Network bears it out.

When we first started, we only had satellites in the neighborhood of the Learning Center. It was expressed by a representative of SBC that it was good we only began with a few sites. That way we would not get too stretched out when problems occurred. We would be able to tweak the system and get the various processes down before "steppin'out." And, boy, was he right!

One of the first issues we had to deal with was the differences between working with computer terminals and working with Citrix and WYSE terminals. (WYSE terminals are small boxes about the size of a walkman CD player. They are the hardware that interfaces with the software applications on the servers and the keyboard, monitor and mouse. All of the processing is done on the servers. Citrix is the program or software on which these applications run.) The latter served to eliminate many of the security problems, but it was not possible to upload files from floppy disks that many people wanted to do. Computer terminals were needed for scanning and making CDs and/or copying to and from floppy disks. However, using computer terminals also made it easier, especially for enterprising kids, to transfer files which may contain viruses that could contaminate the system. The Citrix/WYSE terminal option made it easier for the network administrators to maintain security.

And clearly the expense consideration had to be taken into account. Computers could more readily be obtained via donations from corporations versus having to purchase WYSE terminals. Taking all of this into account, one can clearly see why our system and network administrators were so busy. And in addition to this, they still were responsible for assigning user-names and passwords for all of the participants.

Then there is the challenge of getting all of the site administrators and program coordinators familiar with how to use the applications on the servers. What were the advantages that the Telehub Network provided? How could they best take advantage of the infrastructure that the Telehub Network made available to them? Fortunately, in most of our churches of any size, there are members within them who are, in varying degrees, knowledgeable of the technology. The question was—How could we get them interested

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in the project so that they would work with the coordinators of programs in their churches, and simultaneously with the network administrators at the Learning Center? Clearly a new type of organizing was needed.

We have had success with this in varying degrees here in Kansas City.

However, we encountered more challenging experiences with our satellites in other cities. When we attempted to get set up at Alkebulan Village in Detroit we thought that we only had to send them a configured Virtual Private Network (VPN) box that they could install. Wrong! As it turned out they did not have anyone on staff with the knowledge to do it. However, they did have someone who could use the applications on our servers that would be available to them, once it was up and running. We tried conference calling and video conferences to little avail. Fred Reeder, who was in charge of their program, in desperation said to me during a long distance call, that they were just going to hire someone to install it for them. I remarked to him, "How much are you going to pay for it? If it cost more than an airline ticket, we can send some one up there." We eventually settled on sending George Walker and Jay Williams up there to install it.

We were finally able to get them up and running and things seemed to be going well. They were particularly pleased to be able to use our application to evaluate and track their students' reading levels. However, Murphy's Law always seems to kick in. For some reason—an electrical storm or power outage—their system went down and the VPN box had to be re-configured and set up again. This time we sent up Harrison and Jay. And they got them up and running again.

Here in Kansas City we can more readily handle situations when the system goes down and has to be re-configured again. But in other cities we had to find the counterparts of our technical people here to be there to handle such situations. But the big question that kept haunting us was how to go about engaging local persons in the other cities with the requisite backgrounds. Clearly we could not continue to keep sending someone to them every time some problems, as they invariably do, would occur. And most of the time it only takes an hour or so to get things up and running anyway.

Another observation: At the Learning Center we eventually evolved to the point where we had some paid staffers to see after these things, but in our initial stages we relied on volunteers. At Alkebulan Village they had an all paid staff, and had not relied on using volunteers, especially those with these kinds of technological skills. We tried several approaches. We were working with their chapter of Black Data Processors Association to find someone to help. And for a while that concept looked promising. However, when Alkebulan Village lost the person in charge of operating their program that made use of the Telehub Network, we were all back at ground zero again. You need both: a person (or people) in charge of using the applications and a person (or people) who can provide the technical support for the infrastructure.

At the time of this writing we are still working to solve this dilemma. For if we are to use the Telehub Network as a model of how to deliver technology access to America's urban core, we have no choice but to master this challenge.

In Chicago the situation was somewhat different. There, at the NBUF headquarters where the system had been set up, they had Toriono Granger, a mechanical engineer, who had stronger technological background, and Vincent Johnson who worked in IT to help out. They are in the process of familiarizing themselves with the Telehub

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Network so that the youth programs they plan to establish there, and in other locations, can utilize it.

By the way, once when George Walker was in Chicago on a business trip, he was able to go to their site and check out their operation. This is another type of occurrence that we can take advantage of as we develop this network. From time to time, corporations send people on trips, and we can take advantage of these situations to enable us to become better familiar with each other's operations as well as to have face-to-face dialogues. We have also taken advantage of these business trips whenever one of our folks are in a city where some people may be interested becoming a part of the Telehub Network, to arrange a meeting where they can have a discussion of the concept with them in more detail. We did this again on another occasion when George Walker went on a business trip to San Francisco. We arranged for him to have a meeting with Oba T'Shaka, NBUF's vice president over organizing and training, who is engaged in block- by-block organizing with the thought of setting up Learning Centers based on the DLC here in KC. While there, they engaged in discussions of the possibility of setting up an extension of our Telehub Network in the Bay Area.

As word of the Telehub Network spread, we began to receive inquiries from several other cities. We have also held talks with the possibility of setting up satellites in countries outside of the United States. We have held talks with persons expressing interest in setting up satellites in Haiti, Soweto and Liberia. And there have been others that have suggested that they were interested in making contacts with people in other countries who may be want to get involved with the network. Then there are the regular inquiries we get from persons who are seeking ways to take advantage of the network to help them accomplish a variety of projects of interest.

Our people's imagination seems to be kicking in. Our task is to stay on top of things and not get overwhelmed. But at the same time, we have to be wise enough to take advantage of the opportunities that arise that will enable us to reach higher heights in our overall objective to uplift our communities.

But we have to keep our priorities in order. It has become clear to us that the interest is there. As stated previously, there are over twenty churches here in the Greater Kansas City Area that have expressed a desire to participate in our Telehub Network. And the list is constantly growing. Organizations other than churches are also expressing interest: senior citizen homes and centers, community centers of various kinds, civic organizations,

businesses, etc. The biggest hold up is resources.

Again we are primarily a volunteer organization. We had started the Learning Center with a simple mission. We just wanted to tutor our kids. Bill Grace and Leon Clanton just wanted to help some high school boys improve their reading skills. Vern Glover and I just wanted to set up a program to help get elementary students prepared for high school algebra. Once we came together, things just kept on evolving. And now we find ourselves with an institution that has its own building sitting on four and a half acres. We continued to attract students and volunteers to help tutor them. But the volunteers we attracted had some ideas of their own in terms of what we could do to help our community.

We have set up a science program and a bookstore. But with the advent of our Telehub Network things really began to take off. All of a sudden we were growing to the

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point where we found ourselves having to continuously upgrade and expand our computer labs and server rooms. Now we have actually outgrown our facility. It is not big enough to house and satisfy the need for the hardware requirements to meet our growing demands.

One of our biggest challenges is to upgrade our capability to attract enough resources to meet our growing demands. That means we have to attract the type of people to become a part of the Learning Center who have the knowledge and wherewithal to be able to attract the resources to DLC that will be needed for us to keep up with the growing demands placed on us. Shall "Harrison's Hypothesis" continue to prevail? That is the big question now facing us. In our formative years, we concentrated on attracting persons with strong academic skills with emphasis on math, reading and science. And when we acquired our building, we were fortunate to be able to attract persons with the building craft skills to help us maintain our facility. (Most gave us good price breaks for their work.)

But again, once the IT people became involved things began to take off. Before then, we only needed administrative skills and talents on a limited, although growing, basis. But now, the need for those skills was growing tremendously. We needed accountants, business executives and planners, databases planners and managers, fundraisers, corresponding and recording secretaries, attendance and file clerks and managers, etc. Fortunately, little-by-little we were attracting them. And as they began to work with the Learning Center, they became more acclimated to the DLC's culture. As we often say, however, it takes about three to five years before a person reaches that desired comfort level. But with the rapid and accelerated growth of the Telehub Network, we had to speed up this process. What this required more than anything, on the part of all of us, was what John Henrik Clarke would often acknowledge and advise— PATIENCE.

Patience with each other is one thing, but patience with the plight of our youth in our urban core is another thing. For as Kenneth Clark intimated: when you see a "starving" child, you will be moved to act. Recall: When Bill Grace and Leon Clanton saw the need to help those young men in Central High School, they were moved to act and started a reading program. When Vern Glover stated flat out to me, "Dick, we have to do something with our kids," we acted on that realization by setting up a program to help prepare elementary students for high school algebra.

But that was around the mid seventies. Things and conditions change. Given what they now are, what is needed is an upgrade to our approach. The cultural milieu and relative academic and economic status of the urban core have changed substantially. And the advances in technology have had a significant impact in that. Seeing that, some members of the DLC have been compelled to act. Again, the concept of the Telehub Network is part of our efforts to address that concern.

In our formative years, we had a larger percentage of students who sought enrichment. In these times, many students like those seem to seek other outlets for their interests. Looking back over the years, one realizes that it is the extra-curricula activities that attract the interest of such students, whether in the schools or in the community. This suggests that perhaps we should look into developing programs of this type in order to attract a wider cross-section of students. For it is also observed that students often learn a

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lot from, and are influenced a lot by, their peers. And when this is done in an environment with caring and positive adults working with them, our youth can receive the guidance and a sense of direction that they both need and seek.

The Telehub Network permits this kind of environment to take place. Especially when we network with our churches and community centers where these kinds of programs can be developed, maintained and supported. The key seems to be setting up such programs in institutions where positive and caring adults of good character can contribute their time and talent. Many people seem perplexed as to how to attract such "high quality" volunteers. I submit that the Learning Center is an example, or model, of how to attract such master souls.

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On the album "Observations" Elton Gumbel has penned another song, "My Cup of Tea," with lyrics that speak of such "master souls." Among its lines are the following:

Sometime in your life the desire must be real
To reject what has been done,
and just go for what you feel.

Songs of new beginnings feel just right for me. So music for the people is my cup of tea.

"Music for the people" he writes. But for me that can be taken as a metaphor for any

kind of activity that is beneficial to your fellow man. And the "songs of new beginnings"

are, again for me, a metaphor for the adjustments necessary for the current times.

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In these times the educational systems that our children have to rely on are in dire straits, especially when it comes to reading, math, science and technology. When the Black Family Technology Awareness Association (BFTAA) held its kickoff program for its 2006 activities, Tyrone Taborn, its national founder gave the keynote address. In it he relayed some startling statistics:

4. · **Two-thirds of the public school teachers of math, science and technology do not have a major or minor in those subjects.**
5. · **And the schools serving the urban core have the majority of such teachers.**
6. · **India is producing around 250,000 technology graduates annually.**
7. · **China is expected to produce around 500,000 of them.**
8. · **The United States is only producing around 75,000 engineering graduates annually.**
9. · **And around 3% of them are African American. As a consequence of this reality, this country is losing its technological edge in scientific and technological innovations and in manufacturing. Our children of tomorrow will have to compete for jobs with children of the world, not just those in the United States. And a vast majority of them will be ill prepared for the future that awaits them. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "We have some difficult days ahead." However, James Cleveland left us with the following musing: "No Cross, No Crown." The big question is "Are we up to the challenge?"**

It has become obvious to me that we African Americans who have acquired skills, talents, and any other kind of benefits or blessings have an indispensable role to play. Who else—what other group understands the youth of our urban cores, can relate to them, and can encourage, inspire, motivate, and help instruct and prepare them for their future better than we? In addition to that, we are the ones who have been able to achieve our success and acquire said benefits due largely to the efforts, struggles and work of those who have gone before us. We owe them! They paid the price for our successes!

I am reminded of a conversation that I had with one of my high school classmates, Don Holt who heads Computer Village in St. Louis, shortly after I had returned home from college and had begun working. He was waxing sentimentally on how his mother, Mrs. Gladys Holt, had helped him through Lincoln University in Missouri. He was expressing how he felt gratitude and debt for her support, without which he could not have made it. He was talking about how he wanted to “pay her back.”

I had similar feeling about my grandmother, Mrs. Beatrice “Big mama” Williams. She had raised me when my parents, Leon, Sr. and Beatrice Dixon, made their transition when I was six months and fourteen years old, respectively. I recall telling Don that there is no way you can pay your mother back. The best way to pay her back is to do a good job of raising your kids. Similarly, the best way for the current generation to honor and pay tribute to their elders and ancestors is to do a good job of preparing their youth and laying the ground work for their future.

That same thing can be said for each of our generations as a whole. But I would hasten to say, especially for those of us that grew up in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, and beyond.

I often compare the historic “Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education” decision with the cosmic “Big Bang.” Ever since that era, successful African Americans who have reaped benefits from it have been steadily moving away from the urban core, just as matter has been dispersing as a result of the Big Bang . As a consequence, by the turn of the millennium, the urban core has become less and less populated by persons like these for the youth there to know, look up to, model themselves after, and form bonds with.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book The Tipping Point, discusses the effect on neighborhoods and environments of what the Census Bureau calls “High Status” workers (professionals, teachers, lawyers, doctors, etc.). He points out that for African American’s, when their number in that group falls below five percent, the high school drop out rate more than doubles and teenage pregnancies nearly double.

Although we were not aware of it at the time, over the years it has become more and more obvious to us that the primary benefit the

Learning Center has provided for our youth is not so much the tutoring, although that certainly helps. **It is the establishment of an institution that provides an environment, where African American "High Status" adults are available for our youth to be around on a regular basis, and not simply on a "drive-by" basis.**

In addition to this, there is another salient, but subtle, aspect of the Learning Center that needs to be emphasized. It springs from the observation that the students who remain involved with the Learning Center get to form bonds and relationships with "High Status" role models who remain engaged with them throughout their entire involvement

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with the Learning Center. In other words, long-lasting relationships are formed, somewhat like the ones formed in our churches.

This is especially significant for the elementary years. In a typical school, the students are engaged with a separate "High Status" person (teacher) for each school year. At the Learning Center, there are some "High Status" persons that the students, and their families, get to know and relate to for their entire involvement here—thereby causing the Learning Center to become somewhat of an extension of extended family. As the students grow and mature over the years, these persons, as a natural consequence, continuously monitor and encourage their protégés. They help guide their course selection in their middle and high school years. And they encourage the students to take subjects to help them maximize their talents and interests.

This could help alleviate, at least somewhat, the situation mentioned above— brought on by the diminishing numbers of "High Status" African Americans in our urban cores—that was highlighted by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point*. The middle and high school years can be particularly trying for our youth. And the more positive guidance they can receive from the mere presence of positive "High Status" adults can help them as they struggle to navigate these trying and crucial years. The children in our urban cores should not be left to suffer academically or otherwise.

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In "Search the Skies," another song on "Observation," Elton wrote the following lines that very poignantly expresses this thought.

When I suffer, I know, though it hurts me so, That when I suffer, I don't suffer alone.

So I search the skies

And pull down another reason to try

Looking for a better way

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Trying to stay abreast of the times, and to come up with programs and projects to address the needs of our community, continues to be both a challenge and a necessity. However, we continue to remain hopeful that we can find ways, somehow, to devise methods to address these needs. An observation of the progress that the Learning Center has made thus far illustrates how “we’ve come this far by faith.”

Throughout the existence of the Learning Center we have been fortunate to have people who regularly “search the skies and pull down another reason to try,” and who are constantly “looking for a better way.” We all realize that in order to support our youth as we need to do, we have to create “songs of new beginnings” as we play “music for the people” which, by-the-way, is our “cup of tea.”

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Chapter Six: Contemplation

On Where We Are and What We Are Doing —“Trying To Get Ready”—

Over the years, as we have sought to achieve our mission and objectives, we have been constantly confronted with “unintended consequences.” These are usually regarded as unfortunate things that often occur. However, we encourage each other to view them as “unanticipated opportunities” that sometimes present themselves. And that we will usually a window of opportunity to take advantage of them. To me this means that we will need the insight to recognize them when they present themselves; the wisdom to devise plans of action to achieve envisioned objectives; and the fortitude to follow through with action plans.

Some may regard an “unanticipated opportunity” as good fortune or luck. Luck, however, is preparation meeting opportunity, as the saying goes, and if you fail to prepare—prepare to fail. But preparation requires thought, effort, discipline, and purpose-directed action. And to prepare for the road ahead, it helps to understand the road traveled. This conjures up the concept of “Sankofa.”

So let me take a little time to analyze some aspects of our historical, social and cultural reality that relates to the subject of this memoir. And then discuss how the DuBois Learning Center evaluated them and developed some strategies to address our desire to enhance the acculturation/education of our youth with an eye on how we can do even more in the future.

In Africa there is a bird they called Sankofa that has a neck long enough for it to tuck its head under its wing. Africans analogized this as being able to look into the past. And they used the image of the Sankofa bird doing this as being symbolic of drawing from the best of the past, of one's experiences, and traditions to gain insight for one's future endeavors. Interestingly, Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the liberation movement in Guinea Bissau, expressed a strikingly similar sentiment when he advised us to "return to the source." **However, in order to gain inspiration and insight from the past to guide one's future, it requires reflection and, let me say, contemplation.**

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McCoy Tyner, who was the pianist in the classic John Coltrane Quartet, wrote and recorded a tune, "Contemplation," that features a surreal and pensive melody. Doug Carn, a pianist and lyricist, who put lyrics to several classic instrumental songs by the masters, was inspired to do so with "Contemplation," featured on his album "Revelation." Many of us who were caught up by "the music" were thrilled by what we witnessed in the offerings of Doug Carn. We all felt that it was truly groundbreaking. His then wife, Jean Carn, who had an angelic and melodic voice, brought the song to new heights. Some of its lyrics are as follows:

Soul in a restful state Peace when the day is ending I sit and I contemplate

And search my life for its very beginning.

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Way back — way back (refrain) ... Life is what you make it It's up to you and how you want to take it True knowledge is free Open your eyes and see Have faith in yourself Be what you want to be

Contemplation, sweet meditation ...

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An observation of a social condition that resulted from the sixties, noted in the preceding chapter, illustrates such an unanticipated opportunity as mentioned above. Little was it known how the results of the Civil Rights Movement would be played out. When one observes the blight and despair that resides in our urban cores, one is driven to think in terms of untended consequences.

But let us take a deeper look. The urban cores are densely populated with young people who are suffering academically. And we have churches virtually on "every other corner." That means they are

within walking distance for many of these youths. Now, couple that with the fact that many of our people have acquired a variety of skills and talents that can be utilized to mentor our youth and help work with their development. Every generation that followed the Civil Rights era, has had a substantial number of its members who have been able to obtain a rather comfortable standard of living because of the gains won and doors opened by it. This means that we have the wherewithal within our means to organize a system to address this pressing need in our community. This brings to mind a pertinent question put forth by the O'Jays: "Now that we've found love, what are we gonna do with it?" Here I'm using "love," in this case, a metaphor for our acquired benefits, blessings, successes and good fortune.

The Learning Center and its Telehub Network, I submit, is an example touched on in preceding chapters, of what we can "do with it." But there are so many more, and even deeper, possibilities. Let us contemplate on a musing of Franz Fanon. He analyzes how the revolutionary movements in Africa took off in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*. He states that they always begin with grassroots people. However, they do not take off, he points out, until what he calls the "national bourgeoisie" joins the movement. Actually he says until they betray their "class" interest and join the movement. The point is that they bring the organizational skills and other requisite and pertinent knowledge to bear, that the grassroots people lack. It's among the grassroots where you find so many with the "fire in their bellies." They are the ones known to bring a lot of energy, enthusiasm and "traditional" creativity to be developed and organized. When both come together with their respective contributions, order out of chaos develops, and the odds of their mutual success greatly improve. But again, for this to happen, the "middle classes" have to identify with the "masses," with the realization that they are in the same boat, that it is to their mutual benefit that they come together and work together, and that their mutual success depends on them doing so. Fanon states that it cannot occur otherwise.

Let us contemplate on this concept, while being mindful of the "historical helix," to analyze the times we now are in. I wouldn't argue so much that we have to betray our

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class interest, but rather it is in our class interest. It is commonly said that the most preferred popular culture throughout the world, is that of young Black America. **Look at the creativity (an attribute necessary for our survival)—which includes much more than that exhibited in the arts, athletics and entertainment—that exudes there from. But who is**

mostly benefiting from it. It is mostly this country's ruling classes, and those aligned with them, who own and/or run the corporations and institutions that control just about everything. Consequently, our communities are not benefiting from the fruits of our cultural orchard anywhere near as much as we should. Yes there are some individuals from our community that do well, but not our cultural group as a whole.

Power flows to the organized. What is needed is networking and organization between our "managerial classes" and our "creative classes." It is imperative, as Fanon alluded to, that these two complementary aspects of our cultural community come together for our mutual benefit, not to only survive, but to thrive as well. There are all of those possibilities for entrepreneurial activity, for control of the development of our acculturation. And this is due in no small part to the advances in technology. The onset of the Information Age has made the playing field somewhat more level, at least for awhile—that window of opportunity mentioned above. When these two wings of ours come together, I'm convinced we will fly!

Let us contemplate on our acculturation for a moment. Culture is key. As Amilcar Cabral has pointed out, "Liberation is an act of culture." More to the point, culture influences our motivation for, and methods of, education. It is necessary to educate our youth so that they can lead a quality of life. But "quality of life" should be defined so as to incorporate the needs of our communities. Think about what we say to our youth to encourage them to get a good education. It goes something like this: You need a good education; so that you can get a good job; so that you can make some good money; so that you will be able to live a good life. We hardly ever encourage them with concepts of developing their creative, imaginative and analytical abilities to benefit our families and neighborhoods, and to build up our community. In fact we even heap praise on those from our community who do well in the larger society. And except in extreme cases, like the Civil Rights Movement, we frequently praise them much more than we do the ones who work to benefit our own community.

Tupac Shakur commented in a documentary shown on TV about how it was difficult for him to enjoy his success when his "hommies" are left behind. He lamented the fact that he had few of his friends along with him to share it with.

Speaking of TV: I recall a soft drink commercial wherein it showed an African American man who had just obtained a contract to play professional ball. It showed him celebrating with his friends. One of them remarked that he knew that he would make it. They then proceeded to pop the cans, toast him and drink the soda.

I thought to myself, what if they showed them in a setting where they were

holding a meeting to discuss some plans they had made in case one of them "made it"? They were discussing how one of them had majored in business and was to manage his affairs; another in law and was to become his lawyer; etc.; and they were now in a good position to bring into reality some business arrangements that had previously agreed on. Think of the subliminal message that would send to our youth versus the simplistic commercial that was aired!

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Culture is like the air we breathe and the water we drink. It is the ground in which our cultural orchard is to grow and develop. The acculturation in general and the education in particular of our youth is likened unto planting a seed and cultivating it to full flower. No matter what its genetic quality or the expertise of the gardener, the quality of the air, water and soil in which it is nurtured will greatly impact its outcome.

John Henrik Clarke illustrates this point in one of his tapes wherein he analyzes the conditions in our urban cores by comparing it to the human body and the substances it consumes. If it consumes substances that are agreeable to it, then its organs will process them appropriately. If they are foreign to the body, the organs will reject them and regurgitate them out. He argued that this is what is happening in our urban cores. It is being force-fed an acculturation that is foreign to it, one that is not agreeable to it, and it is in heavens.

Given these conditions, these realities, what kind of strategies should we put forth in order to address them? Clearly we need to concern ourselves with issues regarding, both the formal and informal, acculturation and education processes. And in both cases we need to ask (and answer) the question: **Education for what? As mentioned previously, what we really need to do is strive for a quality of life for our entire community, not just as individuals. Our educational processes should address this objective. The big question is: Who determines what it should be? This is where conflict arises, both with formal education within schools and with the after school programs.**

Keep in mind that Bill Grace and I both started out trying to work with people in the Kansas City, Missouri School District. And they accommodated and utilized our efforts for a while. But there seemed to be forces within the KCMSD that imposed conditions and restrictions as to what could be done and priorities on what to do. What we independently realized was that in subtle ways (and sometimes not so subtle) our youth were receiving an education/acculturation that did not fully address their needs for the world in which they had to live. And subsequently, we independently set out to set up after school programs to supplement the education/acculturation of our kids. Later we merged our efforts into

what became the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center.

We recognized that what many, if not most, of our children needed was to shore up their fundamental skills, in reading and math especially. They had been exposed to the materials, but their understanding of the fundamentals needed tightening up. The concept of using area professionals to volunteer to tutor them in our churches enabled us to do whatever we thought was best, and to employ the approaches and techniques we felt necessary to use.

In most schools the material used for education is heavily laced with Eurocentric content. The people who designed the system regard that as a natural thing to do. They seemed to think that the goal is merely to get our youth to become assimilated into their culture. We have observed that the examples and explanations they use, though perhaps well intentioned, often fail to achieve the desired results of clarifying concepts and motivating students. **And although it is proper for us to be able to work with persons from other cultural milieus, it is imperative for us to be grounded in our own culture. And we set out to operate with that thought in mind. Many of the examples, explanations and motivational dialogue that we use at the Learning Center contain analogies that resonate better with our students, hence enabling them to draw better comparisons for**

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clarifying concepts and leading them to better understanding. Perhaps more importantly, we try to help them realize that, although it is perfectly legitimate for them to use their dialect in their everyday speech, they need to be able to translate between it and Standard English. And that their ability to do so will have a major impact on their future success.

Back in our early days we realized that we had to go about doing things in ways that others outside of our community probably would not understand. We also realized that it may impede some possible funding sources, because they naturally wanted to understand how their funds were being utilized. But we had to proceed with our way of doing things anyway because we felt that that is what our kids needed. We had to do what we had to do! And by us donating our time and the churches donating their space we were able to keep our expenses next to nil. In fact, we often joke about how in our early years we were able to operate with a \$100 per year budget.

Over time we grew to have a deeper appreciation for what we had initiated, confident in the validity of our approach. The testimonies of parents and students encouraged us as well as the progress of our students that we personally witnessed. And the results of the survey mentioned in the Interlude gives further verification of our approach.

"Soul in a restful state," writes Doug Carn, "peace when the day is ending." Those lines of "Contemplation" seem to capture the ambiance of the folks of the Learning Center who have dedicated their time and talents in the service

of our community. Working in the Learning Center over the years and noticing how members of our community have come together and have given of themselves to benefit our youth cannot help but infuse the participants with a measure of inner contentment. This is especially true when the progress of our youth is observed, as mentioned above, and the community itself seems to appreciate our efforts. The mere act of working on objectives such as these makes it easy for us to rise above whatever petty differences we may have to achieve our overall objective which is much larger than ourselves. It is interesting to note how so many of the people who have visited the Learning Center have commented on this ambiance that they witnessed. However, of the many persons who have graced us with their presence, there was one that had a special significance for us.

Dr. Du Bois Williams, granddaughter of W.E.B Du Bois, once came to Kansas City for a speaking engagement, and we were honored to be able to hold a reception for her at the Learning Center. During a dialogue session she asked me, as I reflect on the instance, if we taught Black history. I answered that we didn't per se, because only a handful of parents would send their children to the Learning Center to learn it. But many of them would send their kids to the Center to learn reading and math. I went on to explain how we use materials from, and relevant to, the Black experience and culture to teach them as a matter of course. And that the parents loved it, just as long as we were teaching them reading, writing and arithmetic.

It has been said that more harm is done through ignorance than evil. Many people want to do the right thing. The problem is that people operate out of their own world view. It not enough to simply want to do the right thing, you have to be aware of what is the right thing to do. One of the natural things that the members of the Learning Center do, as mentioned previously, is to use examples that are culturally relevant, examples that

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our youth can readily identify with, to give them insight into educational concepts and even life itself, especially life in the world of the future that awaits them.

Working within the school systems, it is often advisable to be diplomatic in using culturally related materials and approaches, or else there might be repercussions. Sometimes it's even necessary to resort to using Brer Rabbit techniques. But in after-school programs like the Learning Center you can be bold and up front with it. Or as Kool and the Gang encouraged: "Git down with it."

I can recall an instance in my youth that happened when I was at a Boy Scouts camp. That was in the early fifties when segregation was still the order of the day. The camp was owned and operated by the white Boy Scout leaders, but they were "nice enough" to set aside some time for us to use it. However, they had one of their leaders to run the camp for us. Now he

meant well, he really tried to run the camp so that we could enjoy ourselves. I remember that he had us singing folk songs and the like in the evenings after chow. And we all went along with it as children are prone to do.

One day some kind of emergency came up and he had to leave. So he turned the operation of the camp over to Mr. Marshall, the main Boy Scout leader in our community. After the white leader left, the very next evening after chow, Mr. Marshall let us have a talent show, ala live at the Apollo. Man did the atmosphere change. We dipped off into our "ism" and came up with all kinds of stuff and really had some wholesome fun! The point here is that we were able to do the things that we enjoyed and felt like doing. It was like our micro version of Congo Square!

And this speaks to one of the telling points of the Learning Center. We are able to dip off into our "ism," whenever we deem it necessary, and without fear of repercussion, to help drive home certain concepts and truisms—academically, culturally, or otherwise.

But even more important, the only way to move forward, to make progress, is to be true to oneself. If we deny being true to ourselves we will not be able to offer the world the blessings that flow from our culture and traditions. "We have a song to play," LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) wrote in his book "Raise, Race, Rays, Raze." And only by playing our song will we be able to fashion a "world of our dreams." It is as Doug Carn advises: "Life is what you make it, it's up to you and how you want to take it." But in addition to being well grounded, it is necessary to be self confident. And we have to motivate and help guide our youth into believing in themselves and their abilities. Again, as Doug's song says: "True knowledge is free. Open your eyes and see. Have faith in yourself. Be what you want to be."

Having talent though, is not enough. It may be necessary, but it is hardly sufficient. It must be nurtured, developed and honed. So it is not just about "academic" tutoring. Our youth need to see on a regular basis, persons from whom they can draw inspiration; persons whose mere presence can fire their imagination as to their future possibilities; persons from whom they can receive a sense of validation; persons who will mentor them as they master the academic concepts and their self esteem blossoms.

Sometimes it is a daunting task to dig out, discover and develop their innate abilities. However, we must be mindful of the fact that in seeking gold, the nuggets are found by searching in soil. And let us keep in mind that diamonds form from coal as a result of the pressure it undergoes. Even deep within our urban cores, diamonds in the rough are regularly found. It goes without saying that we are constantly on the lookout for our children's interest and talents. And once determined, we offer guidance as to

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what courses they should take, help them find mentors when possible (often

from persons we know or contacts we have), make them aware of other programs out there to be taken advantage of, etc. Sometimes it may even inspire us to establish programs within the Learning Center itself. And our Telehub Network, in particular, has provided us open-ended possibilities for such offerings.

It is often said that the only constant is change. It is also said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center and its Telehub Network are continuously evolving. When we obtained our building, it was like taking a quantum leap. It meant we had to step up from being a loosely organized group, to taking on some serious responsibility. It was the assuring words of Vern Glover that allayed my anxieties when he said to me: "Dick, it's going to be like building a church, just like we did back in Arkansas." (Glover had a grandfather and grand-uncle who were pastors who had built churches.)

Let us look "way back" as in the concept of Sankofa. Ever since we were brought here, we have built, informally at first, and formally later, spiritual institutions. And aspects of our cultural memory from Africa have been retained in most, if not all, of them. Ironically, many people have commented about the sense of spirituality they felt upon visiting the Learning Center. They have noticed the variety of personalities, with their diversity of skills and talents, all working together for our common good. It was often reiterated in the sixties: The way to organize people is around a project. And our objective of working to benefit our youth and community is such a project around which our people can be organized. It is like the gospel song says: "Its something bigger than you and I."

In working with each other, given the faith we have in our mission and abilities to carry it out, over time we have grown to have faith in each other. Even when times got tough and our faith was tested, deep inside we felt that somehow somehow we would prevail. I guess this is what led Harrison to make the comment that has been dubbed his hypothesis. (Recall, from Chapter Three, that he once said to me when I observed that we were short on resources to accomplish some things we had wanted to do: "I noticed that ever since I been up here, that whenever we really needed something, something always seems to comes through.")

The Telehub Network has presented us with as many challenges, it seems, as it has opportunities. **It is heartening to us that we have over twenty churches and community centers expressing a desire to participate with our Telehub Network as of this writing. It is somewhat disheartening to know that the only thing preventing us from going full steam ahead is the financial resources to proceed. It is as though Harrison's Hypothesis is about to receive an "acid test." But we are continuously "Trying To Get Ready" for what the future holds in store for us. Luck is preparation meeting opportunity, as pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. And the staffers of the Telehub Network,**

as well as the other DLC staffers, have been diligently preparing for the next wave of expansion. And already we are receiving suggestions and proposals for a variety of possibilities for the use of the infrastructure that we have in place.

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Back in the mid twentieth century there was an a-cappella gospel choir called Wings Over Jordan. They were renowned for their versions of classical Negro spirituals and gospel songs. On their album "Amen" they have a song entitled "Trying To Get Ready." According to folklore and legend: there was a slave girl that greatly admired a gorgeous white gown that her mistress had worn to a gala affair. When her mistress left for a long journey, she saw this as an opportunity to try on the gorgeous gown. While she was admiring herself in the mirror, she was startled when she saw the image of her mistress appear along side that of hers.

Her mistress had returned unexpectedly for an item she had forgotten. The slave girl, realizing the trouble she was in, started singing: "I'se jest trying to get ready to put on my long white robe."

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The "long white robe" is symbolic of entrance into heaven. For us here on earth, those words can be taken as a metaphor for a desired sought for state of being or existence. For us at the DuBois Learning Center, one such desire, striving to attain The "world of our dreams," is to be able to see the expansion of our Telehub Network to all those willing to make "the hook up," as Master P would put it. In the "meantime" (as B.B. & C.C. Winans sang it), we'll continue "trying to get ready," as we "contemplate" from whence we've come and where we have yet to go.

8

Chapter Seven: Innervisions

Of Where We Can Go and What We Can Do ——"Lift Every Voice and Sing"—
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It is interesting to note that scholars and scientists study and seek understanding of

things that already exist. The engineers, innovators, and technicians create things that have never existed. Statements like these typically refer to the natural sciences. These days, however, there is growing cross-fertilization between the natural and social sciences. We see it, for example, in the discussions of "nature versus nurture" and "heredity versus environment."

And scholars consistently point out how they interact with each other to influence outcomes.

The DuBois Learning Center has as its primary concern the education and acculturation of our youth. And over the years we have seen this kind of cross-fertilization between disciplines take place. The early pre-school years are very important. The nutrition and the nurturing that our children receive in these years impact their later performance. The book *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips), points out the value of iron, for example, in the diet of pre-schoolers. Research, they discuss, has shown that children with iron-deficiency test lower in arithmetic and written expressions, among other things—an insight, among others, that most parents are unaware of. The neurologists have pointed out how the brain develops in stages, and how it does so should be taken into account during the developmental years. The book *Twice As Less*, by Eleanor Wilson Orr, discusses the role that language plays, Black dialect in particular, in learning mathematics.

Speaking of Black dialect: Over the years the linguists have been telling us the importance of language skills in the process of education. And some of the approaches to help African American students become proficient with Standard English oftentimes get misinterpreted. A classic example of this was all of that confusion, caused primarily by the press and other media “mavens,” over the Ebonics question that occurred in Oakland, California. For the record, the state of California had several ethnic groups within it that spoke a non-standard language. The state educational authorities decided that it would be best to teach them English as a second language, and appropriated funds to do so. The educators in Oakland realized that they were having the same type of problems in their efforts to educate African American students who spoke a Black dialect to become proficient in their use of Standard English. (Now linguists will tell you that Standard English is a dialect as well. It is the “standard” simply because the ruling classes speak it and, as a consequence, made it the standard.) The state of California did not want to give the Oakland educators any funds because their students spoke a “dialect,” not a non-English “language.” So the Oakland educational authorities gave it a name, Ebonics, in an attempt to have the “dialect” classified as a “language” so that they too could receive some funds to support their efforts in helping African American students improve their language usage. When that happened, the state department and the press went ballistic. They put it out that the Oakland educators were trying to legitimize “bad” English. All sorts of misinformation, confusion and “excrement of adult male cows” ensued. And a golden opportunity was blown!

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In the process of thinking, people use the dialect that they are used to. In a

formal setting, like school, they are encouraged to translate their thoughts from their dialect to Standard English when they speak or write. When they hear or read Standard English, they have to translate it back into their dialect for understanding. If one is bi-lingual, or bi-dialectal in our case, this task is simpler, if not unnecessary.

Likewise, most people are comfortable thinking in terms of their fields or areas of expertise. Oftentimes it takes an example, a thought, or a concern, etc., from another field or some other area of expertise to spark an insight that leads to a breakthrough or for an understanding of some sought-after solution. This is what happened that caused the idea to be conceived that sparked the breakthrough insight which led to the development of our Telehub Network.

In Chapter One [Step 4] it was explained how I was discussing with Harrison May about how I originally thought that when we came up with the idea of using volunteer professionals to tutor our children in our churches, that it would spread throughout the community. But that did not happen. I was speaking as a community activist, who happened to be somewhat versed in math and IT, and was concerned about the supplementary education of our youth. Harrison was well versed in Information Technology (IT) and networking. He saw (and continues to see) how advancements in his field could be utilized to address the concerns we had regarding the need to spread our concept of helping our kids.

This is an example of how a cross-fertilization of several fields (IT and supplementary education in our case) is often necessary to accomplish a desired objective. It is also illustrative of how the role of technology is becoming ever more important in the education/acclturation of our youth. And it's this cross-fertilization that fires the imagination that enables innovators to innovate. The Learning Center itself and the way it operates are such innovations. But, as has been shown, to come up with the vision that led to our Telehub Network really required an imagination fired by such cross- fertilization. James Weldon Johnson (who also wrote the lyrics for "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and was also a former executive director of the NAACP) talks about the importance to educators of what he calls "collateral knowledge" in his autobiography, *Along This Way*. He says that the master teachers all have it. We often use it at the Learning Center when we delve into our culture for relevant examples to help our students understand concepts by way of analogy.

As we move forward, we will need this kind of cross-fertilization and collateral knowledge from a variety of areas to continue to come up with innovative visions and ways to implement them.

Books upon books have been written on "War and Peace." And they invariably point out how it is not enough to have strategies to win the war; there must be strategies to win the peace. That's speaking globally. On an

individual level, we learn from youth guidance counselors that it is not enough to get our troubled youth to know what they should not do; they have to have some vision as to what they should do. Similarly, it is not enough for members of our community to continue to expound on what's wrong; we have to envision what we need to do to make things right. And after we envision what needs to be done, we need to develop strategies and follow up with action on them.

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But in order to develop viable strategies to carry out our visions, it is imperative for us to evaluate our strengths and assets. So let me offer a brief summary of how the Learning Center employed these processes:

- Situation to be addressed: The need to supplement the education of our youth. — Strengths and assets: Professionals with talent and time to volunteer to help, and

churches with space where the kids can be tutored. — Solution and result: The DuBois Learning Center concept of professionals

volunteering to tutor children in churches after school and on weekends.

- Situation to be addressed: Spread the Learning Center model throughout the community.

9. — Strengths and assets: IT professionals with wide-area-networking knowledge; churches willing to house computer centers; students willing to be trained to prepare the churches to be networked; professionals willing to train and supervise the students to do the work; foundations willing to provide the financial resources.

10. — Solution and result: Churches designated students to wire their facilities; professionals trained students and supervised their work; satellites centers established in the Telehub Network. There is still much to be done, and much we can do. The DuBois Learning Center has been operating since 1973. The advent of our Telehub Network occurred in the mid- nineties. And with it came a cornucopia of collateral benefits, present and potential, to our efforts to supplement our children's education. Among its' fruits are: Present—

- The working together and networking of area churches and community centers involved with the Telehub Network. And the willingness of others to participate.

- The involvement of other persons with a variety of knowledge, talents and skills.

- The involvement of STEM (Scientific, Technological,

Engineering, Mathematics) organizations (including the Black Data Processors Association, the Black Family Technology Awareness Association and the National Association of Black Engineers) with the DLC and its Telehub Network.

- The cross fertilization among the above that began to generate more ideas and possibilities for implementation. Potential—

- Use of the technology by the youth (especially those within the neighborhoods of the churches involved with the Telehub Network) to do their homework assignments.

- Archiving of data and information.

- Hosting existing software applications, as well as software applications that we may have developed, for the use of our participants for classes to be offered or for interactive learning.

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10. · Online and distance learning and instructions.

11. · Online broadcasting—print, audio, video, etc.

12. · Spreading the Telehub Network nationally and internationally. And ideally this should lead to a network of IT personalities to continuously develop, expand and maintain the infrastructure that's created. Clearly the lists could go on. But this is merely to prick the imagination, and to stimulate the envisioning process, in order to bring into reality some of the various possibilities. As we like to say: "We are limited to our collective imagination." "..." Stevie Wonder's album "Innervisions" contains the song "Visions" with the following lines: People hand in hand Have I lived to see the milk and honey land? Where hate's a dream and love forever stands Or is this a vision in my mind? But what I'd like to know Is could a place like this exist so beautiful Or do we have to take our wings and fly away To the vision in our mind? "..." What I hope I have shown thus far in this memoir is how like-minded people can accomplish things when they come together to work together. "People hand in hand," writes Stevie Wonder, and that speaks to our approach, as illustrated in the way our community has cooperated to make the Telehub Network as successful as it is. And we anxiously anticipate greater things to come. Again, let me reiterate that people often tell us how impressed, and even amazed, they are by our ability to attract so many high quality volunteers to bring to reality this environment where we can freely address the pressing need to supplement the education/acclturation of our youth. (Could this be a form of "the

milk and honey land" that Stevie sung about?) Comments have been made, that if we tried to account for all of the hours donated by our volunteers, we would be looking at millions of dollars. But we didn't have that kind of money. What we had was each other and our collective imagination, knowledge and expertise, and our willingness "to take our wings and fly away to the vision in our mind." As we move forward, the "people hand in hand" will have to go beyond the environs of Greater Kansas City. The "vision in our mind" is to expand the Telehub Network throughout the nation. To do that will require us to network with IT persons in other cities. It will require us to organize as we did in the sixties, except—recalling the concept of the "historical helix" again—on another level. In several ways the seeds of this are already beginning to take root. There are leaders of nationally known entities who are aware of what is happening here in Kansas City. One is Tyrone Taborn, the CEO and publisher of U.S. Black Engineers Information Technology magazine. He has made several others aware of our work here and some of

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them have expressed an interest in coming to Kansas City to find out more information and to discuss ways we can work together. Another is Dr. Conrad Worrill, the chair of the National Black United Front. He has put several persons in contact with us to work on projects of mutual interest. Archie Welch is a former member of Freedom, Inc. who now lives in Phoenix, Arizona. He has put us in touch with Larry Witherspoon, who has national IT networks in place and is seeking to expand. Carl Boyd, who is a nationally renowned speaker and educational consultant, continuously works with us to develop programs and projects that could very well have national import. Others have seen our websites (www.duboislc.org and www.duboislc.net) and have contacted us about the possibilities of working together. George Walker and I have held several conference calls with persons in other cities to discuss the possibility of us working together on a variety of projects. Already we see the need to put in place a "new business" committee of the Learning Center in order to appropriately evaluate the continuing propositions that are being presented to us.

Back in the eighties Dick Gregory visited the Learning Center one Saturday morning and had an opportunity to witness our math program in operation. We took out time to let him speak to the students, and later he talked with some of our staff members. He spoke well of our efforts and went further to advise us that we needed to develop and engage in some economic activities. We took his advice to heart. However, the advent of our Telehub Network has really presented us with a vehicle through which we can explore his visionary musings. And the preceding discussions allude to the many possibilities opening up to us.

Of the various types of possibilities opening up to us, there are three in

particular I think are worthy of delving into. One of them addresses our concerns regarding the education/acclturation of our youth; another addresses the opportunity for developing financially enterprising ventures; and the other addresses a form of community networking possibilities in what may be called a Harambee Ujima Effect (HUE).

WITH REGARD TO THE FIRST: Let us consider the nature of the school activities that attract the attention of our engaging and energetic youth. It is the extra-curricular activities that capture their interest. They are the ones that you find them engaged in. To paraphrase the sage Curtis Mayfield: "Got to give them something they can feel." So that suggests that what we should do is establish some activities of this sort that can capture their imagination. Several community organizations that have members involved or are familiar with us, have used the Learning Center to operate their youth programs. However, the Internet radio project, mentioned in Chapter Four, that we call the Frontline Multi-Media Network is one that seems to hold great promise. In addition to it, there is the online teen newspaper, The Rising Sun, which we initiated that holds great promise as well. (The name comes from the line "Facing the rising sun of a new day begun" in the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing." And the fact that the sun is a star, and our youth are rising stars.) The plan is to have The Rising Sun be the youth component of the Frontline Multi-Media Network. That way we will have the adults mentoring the youth. In the schools we have faculty advisors. For The Rising Sun, we will have community advisors, which is an approach we plan to take with all of our extra-curricula activity programs and projects.

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A collateral benefit of these programs is that the academic skills of our youth will sharpen as a mere consequence of their participating in them. They may not even consider themselves as receiving academic enrichment, but that will be a natural occurrence as a result of the guidance and mentoring they will inevitably receive. And by having students with a variety of talents and interest interacting with each, a wholesome environment can be created.

People learn from each other. And there are certain unavoidable processes that must be followed. As the jazz great pianist Walter Bishop, Jr. puts it: First you imitate, then you assimilate, and only after that can you innovate. Everyone learns by observing a "master," by his/her example and by imitating him/her. Assimilation occurs when you contemplate the works of "several masters" and draw aspects and bits-and-pieces from them and evolve your own style or way of doing things. And only after "mastering" the concepts and techniques of the "masters" will you be able to acquire the innervation to innovate.

The best way to get knowledge is to be around it. And by innovating extra-curricular activities wherein our youth can be exposed to "masters" (or "high status workers" as the census bureau puts it) we hope to facilitate this

process.

NOW FOR THE SECOND: After each scientific breakthrough, there follows what is called the clean-up period. That is when the true findings of what has been discovered are delved into and tweaked up; when the painstaking work of solidifying its meaning takes place; and its various uses to which it can be applied are determined. So it is with the establishment of our Telehub Network. This brings us again back to the question posed by the O'Jays: "Now that we've found love, what are we going to do with it?"

Let's explore. As stated earlier researchers, scientists and scholars study and discover things that already exist (like discovering laws of nature, science, and mathematics). Engineers, innovators and technicians take those findings and invent things that never before existed (like inventing things like the light bulb, the telephone and the computer). However, it is the entrepreneurs, commercial and business minded folks whose endeavors find ways to bring the fruits of those labors to the masses for use (like the folks at GE, SBC and IBM). Let me put it another way. As the evolution of science and technology unfolds, that which at one time is the province and playthings of a privileged and esoteric few, in time become the necessities of the masses. Telephones and televisions are typical examples of this dynamic. And the various devices and products resulting from telecommunications and Information Technology (IT) are following in this same phenomenon.

It has been previously mentioned that there have been several persons who have approached us with possible economic ventures. At first we received them graciously, but we really didn't feel that we were quite ready for such engagements at that time. But as they say: "times change." Throughout this memoir I hope I have shown how we have grown and evolved. I mentioned the quantum leaps we have taken: getting the building; setting up the Internet service; establishing the Telehub Network. At each step we had to kick it up a notch. And now we are at the point where we really need to engage the infrastructure established by our Telehub Network to maximize its potential for economic ventures. I have already mentioned that (as of this writing) we will need to establish a "New Business Committee." There are both internal discussions by members of the

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Learning Center and external discussions by persons who have heard about the Learning Center that will have to be thought through and evaluated as to the possibilities of something we can do. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prophesied; "There'll be some difficult days ahead."

AND FINALLY THE THIRD: First of all let us note that the words "harambee" and "ujima" are East African words that mean "come together" and "cooperation" respectively. Ujima is the third of the Kwanzaa principles, which calls for "collective work and responsibility"—hence the label Harambee Ujima Effect, which yields the acronym HUE.

In the process of establishing our Telehub Network, it has been very heartwarming to see the various components of our community “work together” to make the project as successful as it has been. As we move forward to expand nationally, it will require more HUE as we engage other cities. We will have to organize and collectively work with other IT persons to network with the IT persons here in Kansas City as we proceed. We will, for example, have to network and organize to:

- employ backup databases in other cities even;
- engage in various forms of file sharing with archived materials and files;
- network with other persons as they engage in various uses of the technology to operate programs and projects;
- participate collectively with users in other locations through teleconferencing, distance learning, blogging, chat rooms, etc. This can very well cause us to network and organize in ways reminiscent of the “sixties.” Rev. Wallace Hartsfield often says that: “It is not that we aren’t doing anything, it’s just that we are so disconnected.” This suggest that it is in our best interest to find ways to come together so that “our left hand can and will know what our right hand is doing, or at least is capable of doing” so that we can better cooperate and cross-fertilize with each other. We have seen that our Telehub Network encourages, even creates the need, for those engaged within it to work together in order to ensure even greater success and possibilities that otherwise would have been much more difficult to achieve. As the old gospel song says: “Blessed be the tie that binds.” And our Telehub Network has demonstrated that it is a “tie that binds.” And in addition to that, I humbly submit that our Telehub Network has presented us with an infrastructure through which all three of the possibilities referred to above will be embraced as we move forward. Let’s explore further. I have pointed earlier (in Chapter Three) how in the sixties that African Americans entered into the corporations in large numbers for the first time in our history. By the seventies many entered into supervision. By the eighties several entered into mid-management. By the nineties some had moved into senior or upper management levels, some had become directors and others were on cooperate boards. By the turn of the millennium a few had even become corporate CEO’s. And the same thing can be said with respect to academia and government as well other aspects of society.

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All of this means that we now have among us an abundance of experience, knowledge and information, and may I add insight, on all of these levels that we now can tap into. And many have stepped forth to help out the Learning Center in various capacities commensurate with their levels of expertise. It is

incumbent upon us to develop processes and structures within our community based organizations that draw upon what these "well placed" professionals have to offer and make it easy for them to "give back."

For us to confront the challenges that lie ahead we will have to "lift every voice and sing."

I have discussed how corporate professionals have worked with us to secure grants and other resources. Some have even invited us to workshops and presentations to gain exposure and knowledge to some of the latest business procedures and processes. All of this is good and advantageous for we are clearly on the verge of plodding new territory. And it helps to be abreast of the current ways of operating. But as I see it, we will clearly have to learn some things as we go; we will be devising new approaches as we go along.

I often tell young people that I know that they are going to make mistakes in life. But I admonish them not to make the old ones. Their charge is to learn from us so that they won't make the ones we made. What our generation expects from them is for the mistakes they make to be brand new ones, to learn from them and pass on the knowledge and the lessons learned.

As we move forward in implementing plans with regard to our Telehub Network, it is clear that we will have to devise revenue generating activities because relying on grants is risky business. That's why we are somewhat at a stalemate with regards to the advancement of our Telehub Network as of this writing. It is the lack of resources that is preventing us from bringing on board the twenty-some-odd churches and community centers that have expressed an interest in joining us, both locally and nationally (and even internationally). How long will Harrison's Hypothesis prevail?

Stevie Wonder's album *Innervision* contains the classic song "Living for the City." In it he speaks to some of the problematic aspects of our urban cores. The mission of the Learning Center is to address some of those same aspects that pertain to the education/ acculturation of our youth. However, in so doing, a collateral benefit has been that we have also begun to lay a foundation or infrastructure that can be useful in addressing other ones as well.

Finally, let me wind down by relating one of my favorite Texas Southern University stories. It centers on the world record holding mile relay team we had in the early sixties. Notice I did not say they were the best in the state or world at that time, although they were. They were the Mohammad Ali of mile relay teams in their day. They were the "greatest of all time." I happened to overhear the track coach, Stan Wright (who often took the "right stand"), explaining to some of the other professors how he worked with his charges. He stated that relay races are won and lost in the baton passes. And that he would spend seventy-five percent of their practice time working on passing the baton. So being from Missouri, the "show me" state, I had to see for myself. At the next track meet I was determined to check

things out. Now let me add that we were in the Southwest Athletic Conference (the SWAC as we called it). That meant we had to

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compete, at that time, with Alcorn, Arkansas AM&N (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff), Grambling, Jackson State, Mississippi Valley State, Prairie View, Southern, Texas College and Wiley. And all of them had some fast brothers. So when the starting gun was fired, the brothers seemed to be running neck and neck. Then in the baton pass I saw TSU shoot about five-plus yards ahead. I said to myself: "Wow! Check that out." And I observed our lead increase with each passing of the baton!

The analogy I now draw from this is as follows. If our kids are just as smart and talented as other kids (and we all know that they are), how is it that we are losing ground? I argue that it is in the baton pass. That is to say, in the education/acclimation process. That's why I personally feel that what we are doing in the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center is so important. We cannot afford and sit back and wait until the schools get it together. It is incumbent upon us to get involved in order to try and rectify the situation.

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I think the essence of this sentiment as it pertains to our past, our present, and our future is analogized well in the second verse of "Lift Every Voice and sing."

Stony the road we trod,

Bitter the chastening rod,

Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;

Yet with a steady beat,

Have not our weary feet

Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,

We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,

Out from the gloomy past,

Till now we stand at last

Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

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By calling upon those of us that have something to offer, to give back to our beloved communities, I believe we can make a difference. Again as we like to say: "We are limited by our collective imagination," or as Stevie Wonder puts it, to our Innervations. What I submit we have to do is come together so that we can work together in harmony. Recall the old saying that "we can all sing together but we can't all talk together." What we need is some HUE so that we can come together and "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

9

Postlude: Familiar Waters Throughout literature water is used as a metaphor for life. And it is referenced in songs

throughout our culture. In the spiritual realm we have "Take me to the water", and "Wade in the water." And then there are the legendary renderings of Paul Robeson and William Warfield singing "Ole Man River." In the blues we have "The River's Invitation," "Muddy Water," and even Otis Redding " 'Sitting on the Dock of the Bay'... watching the tide roll away ... wasting time." In R&B there's the Four Tops "Still Water (Runs Deep)." In Jazz there's Cecil McBee's "Undercurrent." We should note that it is often the undercurrent in a stream or river that is the most dangerous, that which is more likely to be the cause of drowning than the over-current. And in hip-hop we have TLC in "Waterfalls" admonishing us "Don't go chasing waterfalls. Please stick to the rivers and the waters you're used to."

And lest we forget, there is the folktale of "Shine" about the mythical Black survivor of the Titanic that took to the waters of the ocean rather than go down with the ship. And his survival travails in the ocean mirrors the survival challenges that Blacks have faced in these United States.

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However, I was inspired to feature the song by The Sounds of Blackness, "Familiar Waters" written by Mindy Johnson to highlight in the wrap up this memoir. Among its lines are the following:

Too long away from who I am Too far removed from all I can Be not afraid
what lies ahead It holds your heart too long dead

Your soul awakes to a brighter day Sings new your voice to light the way
Step simply on to a higher ground Where truer peace is richly found

(refrain) Getting back to familiar waters A truer place found deep inside
Something known but long forgotten Once removed and now redefined

That initial line in the refrain, "Getting back to familiar waters," expresses my views as

to what I think we need to do, now more than ever, to address our current

situation. For

it is metaphorical of the approach that the Learning Center and its Telehub Network

chose to carry out its mission to address some of our communities' most pressing needs.

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What our ancestors went through during the "Middle Passage" foreshadowed what we were to go through near the rivers of America. We had to re-acculturate ourselves, learn a new language, learn new survival strategies; in fact we had to "redefine" ourselves, as stated in the song. Any unsupervised gathering of us, during our enslaved period, was considered threatening by our oppressors. So we slipped off "Down by the Riverside" to collect our thoughts, strategize and socialize.

In places where we could quietly gather, we would do our best to educate ourselves, even though it was outlawed. Our oppressors would train us to be able to acquire the skills necessary for us to work for them. But, more often than not, we had to turn inward to acquire the education necessary for our benefit.

When our enslavement ended, it was replaced by "grace period" albeit of segregation. Here too, the training we were offered was primarily to benefit our neo- oppressors. However, when we acquired the franchise in the South, we hurriedly moved to establish "public schools" there so that our youth could receive a more fitting education that could redound to our benefit. For ten short years we seemed to be making steady progress. Then Reconstruction ended and the abyss of "Jim Crow" segregation set in. We went through an ocean of despair. However, as DuBois wrote in "Black Reconstruction," in those ten short years we had acquired enough leadership, as a result of the establishment of the Black Church and the Black College, to navigate us through those rough waters. In fact when our enslaved period ended, we were over ninety percent illiterate. And by the turn of the century, 1900, we were over fifty percent literate. That is an achievement that is unprecedented in human history!

Now let me hasten to add, that we did not do this entirely alone. We had some help by enlightened souls. But the initiative and drive came from within. And this pattern has continued up to this day. We had our "village" concept then and we have our "village" concept now. These are our "familiar waters." Always we have to play to our strengths and with the hand we've been dealt. We should not be mere swine that have neither the insight nor wisdom to take advantage of the pearls cast in our midst.

I argue that the pearls in our midst are the many skilled professionals, people in the trades, and arts, etc., in a variety of areas and fields that have sprung forth from our communities, many as a result of the Civil Rights movement. And among them are "master souls" who will give of themselves for the uplift our communities. These are those who use their education to build our communities, rather than simply being satisfied with receiving a good enough training to earn enough money to live a good life. All of us are products of our environment. Haki Madhubuti has pointed out in his book "Black Men: Single, Obsolete and Dangerous?" that people grow up and do what they have been taught to do. Recall the type of things we say, mentioned in Chapter Six, that we typically use to encourage our youth to get a good education: You need a good education so that you can get a good job; so that you can make some good money; so that you will be able to live a good life. And that is what most of our youth who receive a good training and acquire good skills grow up and do. It is our "master souls" who step out of this acculturated path and use their talents to uplift our communities.

Moreover, ever since the end of our enslaved period onward, we have established institutions, such as churches and community centers, which are facilities that are owned or controlled by members of our community that we have used for the betterment of our communities. These are examples of "familiar waters" that we have traditionally used to

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collect our thoughts, to organize ourselves, to get ourselves together, and to pool our resources for our collective uplift.

Kansas City is fortunate to have in its midst a grand old man that many of us regard as the sage of our community, Dr. Jeremiah Cameron. He is a retired educator of over forty years. Among the positions he has held was the head of the English department at Penn Valley Community College. He has written a series of articles on the "Brain and Learning" and some reading lesson plans for elementary school children that are posted on our website. See:

- <http://www.duboisl.org/EducationWatch/JCameron/JCameronArticles.html>, and
- <http://www.duboisl.net/read/YouCanRead/YouCanReadIntro.html>. I was personally blessed to have him as my high school English teacher. (And given the fact that he had gone to school with my parents, aunt and uncles, I knew that I had better shape up while I was under his watchful eye.) Dr. Cameron has often expressed to me that the most important thing that the Leaning Center is providing our children is not the tutoring. It is providing our youth with the realization of caring adults giving of themselves and their time to work with them. (Although it is clear to all concerned that the tutoring benefits them as well.) One of our slogans states: Children learn more from what you are than what you teach.

Others have often commented on the quality of our staff, and the mere fact that so many of them volunteer their services is what many find remarkable. Professor James Smalls of New York said to us, "You would have to go to the community college level to find a comparable staff." Many people who have witnessed the Learning Center have made similar comments. In addition to that, from what they've observed, they tell us, in effect, that what the Learning Center has done is provide a model of an organization or institution that is set up in such a way as to make it possible for the "master souls" that are the "pearls," referred to above, to give of themselves to the benefit of our community in an environment wherein they can try out their visions and are free to do things in their own way. (Or to paraphrase Elton: It makes it easier for them to get off the mountain and come back to the valley.) And again as we like to say, they are limited by their collective imagination. I like to think that this is another way of "getting back to familiar waters ... something known but long forgotten, once removed and now redefined." Professor Smalls has charged us with the responsibility of spreading this concept.

In this Information Age that we have entered into, there are opportunities opening up to be taken advantage of. If only we have the wisdom and insight to see the pearls in our midst. The establishment of our Telehub Network, I submit, is an example of taking advantage of such an opportunity. And as a result, many more opportunities will open up for us to take advantage of.

Hopefully we can use the Telehub Network to help fashion a more enlightened culture in our communities. Culture is key. It affects all things, especially the education of our youth. The acculturation they receive determines what they consider important, what they want out of life, and how hard they will be willing to work to accomplish it. Amilcar Calbral, an African sage and visionary, stated it well when he said that "culture is an act of liberation."

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Lloyd Daniel is a member of our community that many of us refer to as our poet laureate. In his poem "The Mind and the Body" he states "the mind and the body, you know that since the start, the mind and the body, ain't never been apart." This stresses the need for an emphasis on holism—both mental and physical, and in these times I would add, emotional and spiritual. Kwame Nkrumah, the late prime minister of Ghana, used to speak about "thinkers and doers." We especially see this kind of coming together within the Learning Center's Telehub Network. What I often refer to as a dance between the "hard techs" and the "soft techs," those who build and undergird the infrastructure, and those who use it to develop, maintain and employ applications that run on it.

Later in the poem he tells us "we stand on the brink of another man, all around the word the land is changing hands." But what of this "another man"

is he speaking? I would argue that he is a man who will “be not afraid of what lies ahead”; a seer who prophesizes to fellow travelers—know “your soul awakes to a brighter day”; a visionary with the foresight to “step simply onto higher ground”; a sage who counsels that we can attain the world of our dreams by “getting back to familiar waters, a truer place found deep inside.”

And what of this “brink’ we’re standing on? I submit its foundation, its cornerstone, is “a truer place found deep inside.” It’s likened unto the aforementioned cultural and historical helix (see Chapter Five) in the sense that it comes back around but on another level. It’s the metaphysical verge of a higher level of vision, insight and indeed an action to be taken, based on the best of the tradition and cultural traits that’s served us well up to this point, but upgraded for these historical times. It’s “something known but long forgotten, once removed and now redefined.”

Indeed, “all around the world the land is changing hands.” But not necessarily in the sense usually meant. In this era, the Information Age, it’s more of a virtual change, or change in infrastructure and “undercurrent,” if you will. But this dance within “familiar waters” must continue for success in this era.

And this again brings us back to the observations of the Learning Center’s Telehub Network. Already we have witnessed a cooperative spirit emerge among the participants of the Telehub, a pulling together, a dance if you will, to help make it successful. “Blessed be the tie that binds” the classic gospel tune reminds us. And the Telehub Network is certainly binding us together. We have coined an expression that seems to capture the essence of all this: “competitive cooperation.”

As the youth and others engage the technology, they invariably come up with creative new things, or ways of doing things. When it is observed, others want to bring their operations up to speed. And we have seen processes shared by those who create them. So you have competition, but at the same time you have cooperation. That creates a win-win environment.

Aretha Franklin established a new phase of her career when she left Columbia Records and joined Atlantic Records. For her very first album there, “I Ain’t Never Loved a Man the Way that I Loved You,” she recorded a song entitled “Don’t Let Me Lose This Dream.” And in it she pleads “baby, baby hold on.” Then she repeats the words in the title followed by “baby, baby be strong.” As we seek to fashion “The World

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of Our Dreams,” we should be mindful of Aretha’s plea. After all, we’ve “come this far by faith,” and we still have a ways to go. But we can make it if we try.

So let me conclude this memoir with the words of W.E.B. DuBois that opened

the prelude. And with a gentle reminder that although they are from his speech given during the era of segregation, entitled "The Field and function of the Negro College," that their essence still rings true today.

We live our lives in years, swift, flying, transient years. We hold the possible future in our hands but not by wish and will, only by thought, plan, knowledge, and organization. If the college can pour into the coming age an American Negro who knows himself and his plight and how to protect himself and fight race prejudice, then the world of our dreams will come true and not otherwise.

He goes on to say: If we use our brains and strength there is no way to stop our ultimate triumph as creators of modern culture—if we use our strength and brains. And what, pray, stops us but our dumb caution—our fears—our very sanity. Let us then be insane with courage.

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skip to chapter 5 observations

chapter 6 contemplation

chapter 7 inner visions page 6

The best way to get knowledge is to be around it. And by innovating extra-curricular activities wherein our youth can be exposed to "masters" (or "high status workers" as the census bureau puts it) we hope to facilitate this process

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As we move forward in implementing plans with regard to our Telehub Network, it is clear that we will have to devise revenue generating activities because relying on

grants is risky business. That's why we are somewhat at a stalemate with regards to the advancement of our Telehub Network as of this writing. It is the lack of resources that is preventing us from bringing on board the twenty-some odd churches and community centers that have expressed an interest in joining us, both locally and nationally (and even internationally). How long will Harrison's Hypothesis prevail?